

Skolverket – a presentation

The National Agency for Education

Skolverket, the National Agency for Education, is Sweden's national authority for pre-school activities, school-aged child-care, schools and adult education. The Agency's role is to review and evaluate education, stimulate development and check the performance of the education system in relation to legislation and statutory regulations.

Remit and division of responsibility

The National Agency for Education's collective remit is to make active contributions to ensure that national objectives for pre-school activities, school-aged child-care, schools and adult education are achieved. In order to gain information about the various institutions and to promote improvement, the Agency is involved in follow-up, evaluation, development and supervision. The Agency conducts quality audits and also maintains and supports research into educational matters.

It also provides ongoing information on the situation of Swedish pre-school activities, school-aged child-care, schools and adult education to parliament and the government, the municipalities and the general public. This information plays a fundamental part in decisions relating to the various institutions and the ways in which they can be improved.

The National Agency for Education has also developed new forms of support for local development of educational activities and is increasingly involved in direct contact with individual municipalities and schools.

The National Agency for Education was founded in 1991, coinciding with a change in responsibilities for education. State controls were replaced by an objectives-based system with a high level of local responsibility.

- The Riksdag and the government determine the national objectives and guidelines for pre-school activities, school-aged child-care, schools and adult education in Sweden. Rules are set out in the Swedish Education Act, the curricula and various statutory regulations. These rules are intended to control the nature of educational activities and to guarantee equivalent, standardised operations in all parts of the country.
- The National Agency for Education develops syllabuses and grading criteria in addition to providing general advice. Its responsibilities include the national school head training programme, and the approval and supervision of independent schools. Swedish education overseas which receives financial support from the state also falls within the National Agency for Education's remit.

- The municipalities have primary responsibility for pre-school activities, school-aged child-care, schools and adult education and have a duty to distribute resources and organise operations to enable pupils to meet the national objectives.

Provided they comply with these basic regulations and principles, all pre-schools, schools and leisure-time centres are free to adopt working methods to suit themselves.

The National Agency for Education has a central unit on Kungsholmen in Stockholm and eleven local units spread around the country. The local units take part in the overall activity of the Agency, responding to various indicators and signals, evaluating data and analysing the information which the Agency compiles, in consultation with the municipalities in their respective geographical areas. In addition, there are four regional supervisory units.

This brochure provides a brief description of how The National Agency for Education operates. www.skolverket.se is a source of further information. It is also possible to download and order reports and other documents from the website.

Follow-up

The National Agency for Education regularly collects data from the municipalities relating to pre-school activities, school-aged child-care, schools and adult education, thus gaining fundamental knowledge of how they function. Information is gathered each year relating to how activities are organised, how much they cost and the results achieved. Follow-up forms the basis for official statistics relating to the sector for which the Agency is responsible.

Follow-up information provides the basis for comparisons, provokes questions and stimulates debate and discussion. In-depth studies are carried out in order to give a more finely balanced view. National surveys of the attitudes to schools of the general public, parents, pupils and teachers are also carried out.

The knowledge built up through follow-up can lead to further measures in respect of evaluation, development and supervision.

SIRIS, the National Agency for Education's internet-based results and quality information system, makes it easier to find information collected by the Agency. Pupils, parents, politicians, civil servants, journalists and everyone working within the education system can study and compare the circumstances of various schools and the results they achieve in order to encourage their efforts towards development. Much of the information is presented at school level so that individual school results can be studied. It includes data on pupil and teacher numbers and collective records of final grades achieved by pupils in compulsory and upper secondary schools.

SIRIS also features the analysis tool SALSA which enables finely-tuned comparisons to be made between schools. SALSA shows grades achieved in relation to the educational attainments of parents, pupil gender and the number of pupils with overseas backgrounds, all factors which have an effect on results. SIRIS can be accessed at www.skolverket.se

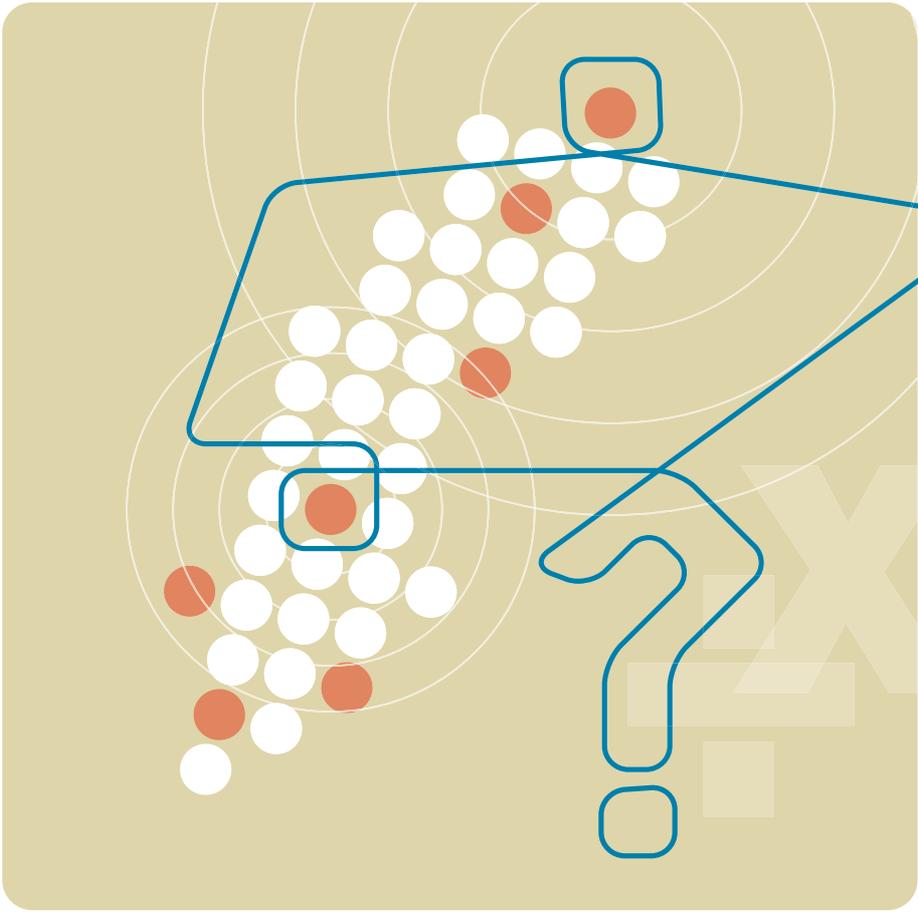
In order to estimate the need for teachers, the National Agency for Education produces forecasts. These are based on adaptations of various registers indicating, for example, the number of teachers who are expected to retire and the subject skills which will be required in the future. Other input sources are estimates of pupil numbers and changes in the teacher-pupil ratio over the years.

Agency forecasts are used by the government, universities and other higher education institutions in order to calculate the number of places needed on teacher training courses. Municipalities also use the forecasts for planning purposes.

Evaluation

Evaluation entails in-depth study and analysis in specific areas. The choice of these areas may be based on information from follow-ups, other problem indicators or the need for detailed knowledge about a particular subject such as the effect of new reforms. The purpose is to analyse and explain from various points of view and to provide the basis for objective discussion relating to pre-school activities, school-aged child-care, schools and adult education, and for decisions to initiate changes.

Evaluation takes place in a selected number of municipalities and in various pre-schools, leisure-time centres, schools and/or adult education establishments. Evaluation enables the Agency to find out and assess how activities are being carried out, their content and results. The results of evaluations are of fundamental importance to those responsible for, and active in, education in their



Examples

The National Agency for Education was commissioned by the government to monitor development in the municipalities of integration between the pre-school class, compulsory school and leisure-time centres. A project group conducted case studies in a number of small municipalities, interviewed parents and acted as observers in various situations.

Results show that integration is proceeding well, even though it has resulted in more schooling for 6 year-olds than was intended in the reform. In view of this, pre-school staff should be given more time for dialogue, planning and evaluation together with other education specialists in the system.

A quality audit of grade assessment in municipality schools showed that both pupils and teachers have a positive attitude to the new goal- and knowledge-related grading system, largely because pupils are measured against set objectives rather than compared to each other. But the audit also showed that a majority of pupils and teachers are of the opinion that the national objectives and criteria are imprecisely formulated. This makes it difficult for pupils to understand what is required in order to achieve certain grades. There is often a lack of agreement between teachers at the same school as to which criteria apply for different grading levels, similarly between different schools and types of school within a municipality.

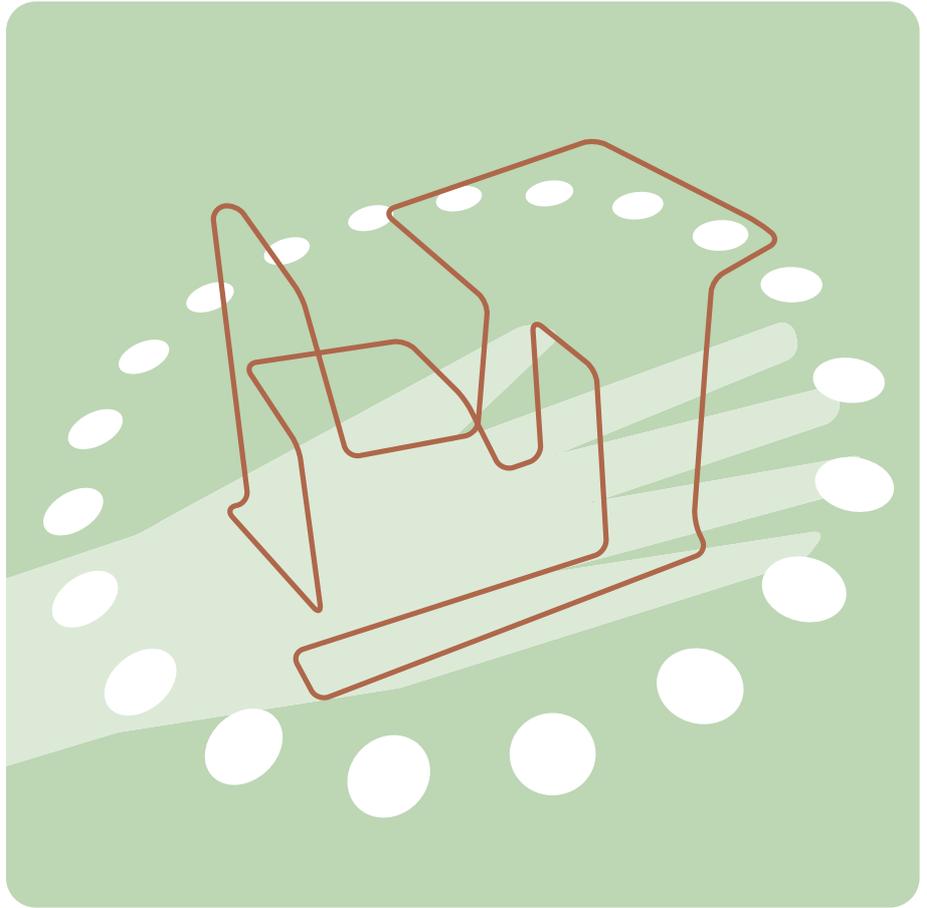
The audit group's recommendations included a suggestion that the municipalities should take the initiative for harmonisation of grade setting and for schools to strive towards making grade criteria as clear as possible to link in with their own teaching.

efforts to improve and revitalise their work. Facts and analyses produced by the Agency via follow-up and evaluation form the basis of improvement initiatives at all levels in the system. In addition, international comparative studies are carried out to evaluate the Swedish education system in relation to other countries.

Special conditions apply to quality audits carried out by the National Agency for Education: the Swedish government specifies the subject areas for research into the ways in which pre-school activities, school-aged child-

care, schools and adult education institutions are working to achieve the national objectives. Most of those responsible for these audits are recruited from outside the system owing to their expertise in specialist areas. The focus of quality audits is the education which pupils actually receive.

Whilst the National Agency for Education does not conduct its own research, it does initiate, monitor and publish results of research at universities and other higher education establishments.



Examples

A pupil in year 6 had for a long time been subjected to physical abuse and verbal taunts. The school and the principal organiser maintained that the school had constantly made efforts to stop the bullying and to improve the school situation for the pupil in question. In their view the bullying had stopped and it was up to the individual pupil to let them know if it resumed.

The National Agency for Education held that the bullying had not in fact stopped, and stressed the importance of evaluation to see if the measures adopted are the right ones. The duty to report the situation placed on the pupil does not accord with the responsibility of the principal organiser under current regulations.

The new rules governing upper secondary schools require remedial programmes for all pupils in need of special support. In a systematic supervisory review, the National Agency for Education studied the extent to which upper secondary schools are complying with this policy. In one of the municipalities under review there were no remedial programmes and obtaining support in any subject other than Swedish, English and mathematics presented difficulties.

Follow-ups revealed that the municipality took a positive view to the supervisory review and had taken the appropriate steps to ensure compliance with the new rules.

A pupil at an independent school was informed he was no longer welcome at the school. According to his parents, the reason for his exclusion was that he had not paid sufficient attention to his school work, that he had been badly behaved and had disrupted other pupils. The National Agency for Education contacted the school head who claimed that the pupil was a danger to other pupils. The school cited the Swedish Working Environment Act as part of the reason for its actions.

The National Agency for Education ruled that the school had excluded the pupil without grounds under current regulations and therefore voiced criticism of the school. The Agency's follow-up of its ruling revealed that the exclusion had been withdrawn immediately and that the pupil had returned to school.

Supervision

The National Agency for Education is the supervisory authority for pre-school activities, school-aged child-care, schools and adult education. The Agency is therefore responsible for checks to ensure that the principal organisers for schools, adult education and state child-care comply with national regulations and various policy documents.

As requested by the government, checks are conducted annually on one sixth of Sweden's municipalities. There is also regular follow-up of independent and overseas schools.

Other reasons for the National Agency for Education to decide to adopt a supervisory approach might include parents who complain of shortcomings in the system. The Agency also assumes a supervisory role when there are signs of other shortcomings.

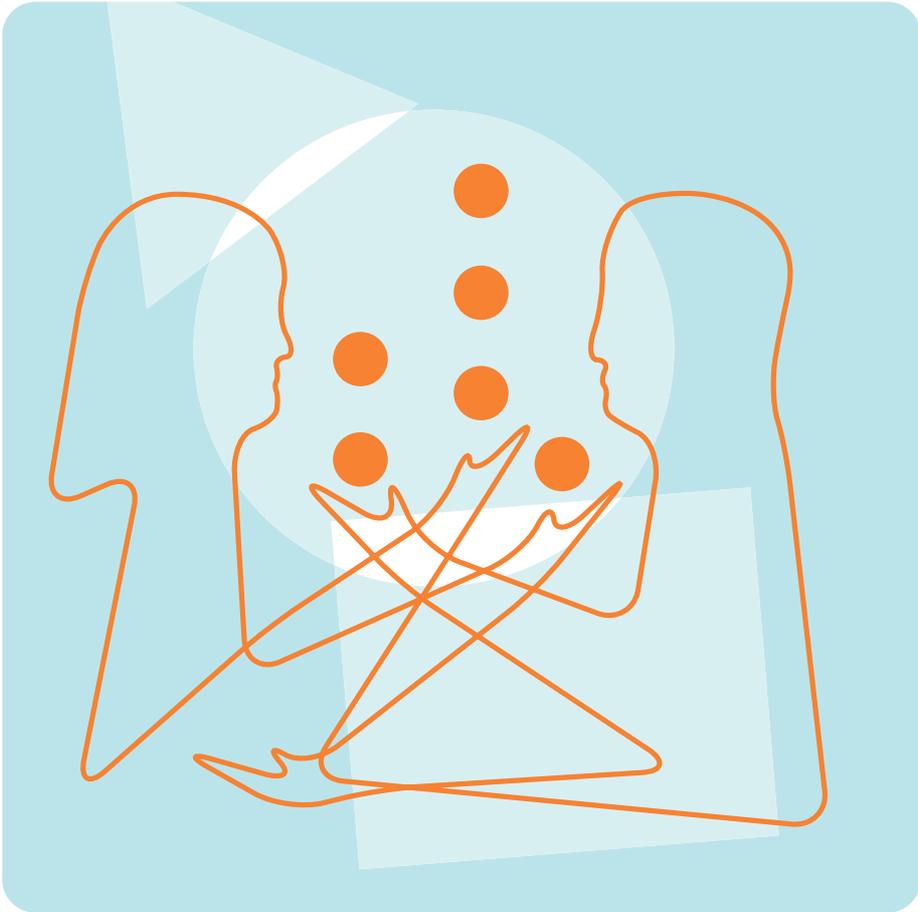
Supervision sometimes occurs within certain priority areas such as access to education, opportunities for all pupils to achieve learning objectives and their right to support, efforts to eliminate abuse, pupil and parental influence and the obligations of the principal organisers to manage their own affairs properly.

Development

The National Agency for Education promotes the development of pre-school activities, school-aged child-care, schools and adult education via measures of active support aimed at improved achievement of objectives.

This support takes the form of general communication and information initiatives together with specially targeted support for selected institutions and principal organisers.

General initiatives include the production of information and reference materials, organising seminars and



Examples

The National Agency for Education works in various ways to support and develop the work of schools with regard to fundamental values and health. A quality audit of sex and relationships education, education relating to tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and efforts to reduce bullying and other forms of abuse showed that the management and organisational skills of school heads are decisive factors in the quality of teaching and the general atmosphere in schools.

In support of schools heads, the National Agency for Education produced a pamphlet, "My job is to tie it all together". It includes an analysis of the problems and opportunities present in the efforts of heads to develop the three areas.

During the European Year of Languages, the National Agency for Education was active in focussing attention on the significance of language skills. There is a lively debate on the value of language skills. A large majority of the pupils in compulsory school opt to study German, French or Spanish in addition to their native language and English, yet many of them give up their language studies at an early stage.

The developmental work regarded as a priority by the Agency includes extensive competence development training for teachers, a major languages conference, the production of a language anthology and the establishment of a special subject area and a discussion forum at the Agency website.

conferences, supporting competence development and networks of various kinds, and communicating and providing information via the Agency website.

Targeted initiatives are based on situation analysis and established needs for measures to improve results and increase the level of objectives attainment. Analyses and remedial plans are produced in consultation between relevant authorities, institutions and the National

Agency for Education. Each year this work involves around 60 municipalities, and eventually all of them will have been covered. Special attention has been paid to development of the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. One general aim is to improve the capacity of local institutions to carry out systematic reviews of their own results in relation to the measures they have taken, and to work towards long-term sustainable development.

Where to find the National Agency for Education

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