



TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION COUNTRY REPORT

SWEDEN

1. Details of authors of report

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Introduction

As this report is being written, Swedish education is facing sweeping changes. The Swedish parliament has passed a resolution on new national curricula for the compulsory school and a Government bill for a new Education Act has been submitted. These regulatory documents, fundamental as they are for the school system, will come into force in 2011. The changes will affect the area of teacher training as well. The initial teacher training programme from 2001 will be replaced in 2011 by a new programme that will differ from the old one in a number of ways. The work of this report was complicated by the fact that the Government bill regarding the future of teacher education was to be presented on 11 February 2010, exactly in the middle of the compilation and writing of this report. An easy way to handle this problem would have been to content ourselves with a description of the teacher training programme from 2001 and to make little mention of the upcoming changes. Such a procedure would have seemed all the more justifiable in view of the fact that students enrolled in the present system will continue to receive degrees up until at least 2014.

However, as the project *Teacher Education for Inclusion* will continue until 2012, we have decided that it would be of value to include some words about the future courses of study. At the same time, we are well aware that no teacher training programme changes overnight as the result of a parliamentary resolution. Many teachers and researchers will continue to work in the environments they are used to, and organisational and managerial structures tend to stay intact. This justifies, as we see it, using empirical and practical examples from the 2001 curriculum to illustrate the questions raised in the project. Also, naturally, it is not possible to give examples from a programme that has not yet begun.

Swedish higher education and thereby Swedish teacher education as well are not regulated in detail by the State. Instead it is Parliament and the Government together that lay down the framework for higher education and the academic degrees, which is then the responsibility of each academic institution to fill with specific content. Beyond the general regulations of the Higher Education Act there are descriptions of degree fulfilments that the academic institutions offering initial teacher training need to take into consideration. The work of these institutions is under continuous inspection by the National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE). If the NAHE feels the quality is not good enough or in some other way does not fulfil the set goals, the higher education institution's right to grant degrees may be questioned or withdrawn. A consequence of this relatively decentralised system is that the educational programmes, even those leading to the same degree, may differ greatly from institution to institution. There are thus no national guidelines or recommendations to lead the way in teacher education, which limits us in our descriptions of aspects such as content, method, evaluation, examinations and 'best practice'. Indeed it is likely that there are as many ways of describing the plan and content of teacher training in Sweden as there are higher education institutions for teacher education, of which there are 24.



Because the country's teacher training programmes are so very different from each other, the Swedish group has decided that it would be difficult to provide a fair and generalised picture of these different programmes within the framework of the project. Thus, the report below will a) base its discussion, when possible, on national documents and resolutions regarding teacher training, and then b) use one of the country's higher education institutions, namely Borås University College, to provide examples. We feel that describing a 'case' in this way helps promote a deeper understanding of how students are prepared for their future role as teachers in a comprehensive school. Borås University College has some 1,100 students enrolled in its initial teacher education programme, which gives it a middle-sized position as compared to other teaching institutions in Sweden. One of five 'Case Study Visits' in the spring of 2010 was located at the teacher programme in Borås, which is another reason for further elucidation in the project. Other reasons are that the quality at Borås University College has been approved after inspection by the NAHE, that 40% of its teaching staff has a doctoral degree and that the institution carries out extensive research in the field of teacher education. As a complement to initial teacher training a master's programme in education corresponding to 120 ECTS credits is also offered.

This report is largely arranged to follow the recommended structure of the project plan, *Teacher Education for Inclusion*. By way of introduction however we will give a brief historical description of the field and the concept of inclusion in the Swedish context.

Brief history¹

Sweden received its first law on public education in 1842. Besides stipulating that towns and municipalities were obliged to set up schools for children, the law required that teachers had adequate training. Not until 1865 however, was a regulated programme for teacher training established. Initially this was a three-year programme but not long after this was increased to four years. In other words, teacher education was relatively long even in the beginning, which was entirely in line with the explicit ambition of raising the educational level of ordinary people.

After a long period of highly differentiated schools during the first decades of the 20th century, it was resolved in the early 1940s to make a study of how a transition to comprehensive schooling for all children would be received. The country's four professors of education were asked how an undifferentiated school for all could be created on scientific grounds. It was agreed that one of the most important factors for the success of such an extensive reform, and one which at the time had never previously been tested in the industrialised part of the world, was the reform of teacher education. In 1952 the first proposal regarding teacher education in Sweden was presented, where teacher students who were focused on different age groups of pupils studied together during parts of their education. Such an education was considered to be motivated by the demands of a future comprehensive school.

In 1960 Parliament passed a bill to establish a nine-year compulsory school system for all children, and five years later a Government commission presented its report after its investigation into a new teacher education programme that would fully prepare teachers to work in the new comprehensive school. Teacher candidates, regardless of what age groups they intended to teach, were to study certain subjects together, most of them having to do with pedagogy and teaching methods but also the study of certain subjects.

¹An outline of basic teacher education in Sweden can be accessed at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php . However the summary given there is so brief that we feel we should provide a more descriptive picture of how teacher education in Sweden evolved side by side with the establishment of compulsory education.



The reasoning behind this was to create an understanding for the need of teachers to work together over boundaries of subject and age.

During the 1970s further studies on teacher education were commissioned but Parliament did not adopt any resolutions about teacher training to harmonise with the curriculum of the comprehensive school until 1984. Four years later a compulsory school teacher programme with two foci was introduced, one covering Years 1–7 and one covering Years 4–9.

During the years between 1990 and 1999, the Swedish school system underwent radical reform, making it one of Europe's most decentralised. This brought with it high demands on teacher education to ensure the protection of equal education and the right of all pupils to full participation in school. It could be said that it was the teachers' basic teacher training, among other things, which determined to what degree they would come to work with the principles of inclusion. This basic training was intended to be broad in the sense of an emphasis on the benefits of crossing over traditional subject and age boundaries.

These issues were further accentuated in connection with the introduction of the teacher training programme of 2001. A parliamentary resolution of 2000 meant the introduction of a common degree for teacher education, despite specialisations in terms of age group, activity and subject. All teacher students were to be trained in so called general education studies corresponding to 90 ECTS credits, adding individual options of various combinations of focuses and specialities. Among the available foci and specialities was special needs education, but the skills that were to be gained did not primarily involve learning the traditional way of teaching special needs but learning how to handle the natural differences that all pupils have. Another way of expressing this skill is that the teachers-to-be were to learn how to work with the perspective of inclusion.

Special needs skills

In connection with the introduction of the compulsory school (Years 1–9) in Sweden, there was an increasing need for special needs skills in handling the increased heterogeneity of the schools. Special needs education was a means of differentiating pupils with various disabilities and other difficulties in carrying out school work. The field expanded extensively during the first years of the compulsory school. Special needs teaching programmes were set up in Stockholm and Gothenburg, and the places were quickly filled. During the 1980s there was a trend towards 'special needs educational activities' rather than 'special needs education', with the latter regarded as one of several ways of organising education for pupils with special needs. However special needs education gradually came under increasing fire, including some critical reports from Government commissions, who felt that the teaching was ineffective and led to questionable results and might stand in the way of the goal of 'a school for all', an inclusive school. Special needs teaching took place mainly in specially arranged rooms that were separate from the regular tuition in the classroom. More than one in three pupils was receiving special needs support during Years 1–9, which critics felt was a departure from the principle of a comprehensive school for all. The typical scenario was thus that those who had the poorest conditions for learning were those who were excluded from the group spirit of the class. For this reason Parliament resolved to introduce a new secondary teacher training programme for special needs education in 1989. The term 'special needs teacher' was replaced with the term 'special needs educator' to emphasise the difference between the positions, with the educator carrying out broader tasks than just teaching. Besides instruction to pupils with learning difficulties, the special needs educator was expected to advise colleagues and carry out evaluatory and developmental work. The training programme that began in 1990 is largely the same today.



As of autumn 2008, the academic degree for special needs education was reintroduced and a number of institutions in Sweden were once again given the assignment of setting up special education programmes. These programmes are described in more detail below.

If we summarise developments from 1960 onwards, we see that the system was designed to make it possible to find solutions for most of the pupils within the framework of their own class or school. Differences between pupils were viewed as natural, which is in line with the intentions of the Salamanca Declaration. The role of the special needs educator meant that a pupil's need of extra support was evaluated in a needs analysis, which included elements such as the teacher's ability to adapt the methods and content to the pupils' circumstances and needs and whether supervision was available regarding children's and young people's problems in general. Unlike the work of the special needs educator, the work of the special needs teacher was focused more directly on pupils. The role involved the special needs teacher working with children and pupils, whether they were in preschool class, school or adult education, who were in need of special support in language, writing, reading and/or mathematics. The special needs teacher was expected to participate, for example in the work of drawing up and accomplishing action plans for individual children and pupils, in co-operation with other involved parties. He or she should also have the ability to critically examine and independently carry out educational studies and analyse difficulties on the individual level in various learning environments. The special needs teacher should also be able to work directly with the tuition of pupils in need of special support, which could take place within the framework of the classroom or more individually.

All teachers were expected to have the understanding that functional impairments were within the range of normal differences. With that starting point, it was natural that the teacher, when his or her own skills were inadequate, would seek support from the special needs educator or teacher or other specialists, without waiving his or her own responsibility for the pupil. We could say that the change in attitude towards special needs skills reflects both an individual and a system perspective. It became as important to study the pupil's learning environment as his or her individual characteristics.

2. Wider policy framework supporting teacher education for inclusion

The 2001 teacher training programme

The present design of the teacher training programme, leading to the same degree throughout the country, has its origins in a reform from 2001. Teacher training in Sweden currently (April 2010) comprises 180–330 ECTS credits, depending on the chosen form of school or activity, subjects and ages the teacher is to work with. During their studies students choose to work with

- preschool;
- preschool class;
- after-school recreation;
- early years of compulsory school;
- later years of compulsory school, or
- upper secondary school.

The institutions are free to organise teacher education as they see fit, which means, for instance, that one can offer training for work in preschool, preschool class or the early years of primary school, while another might offer work with preschool, preschool class or after-school recreation. For older pupils, the programme might focus on the later years of



Years 1–9 and upper secondary school or be somewhat broader within one type of these schools.

Teacher training programmes are offered at 24 institutions, from Luleå in the north to Malmö in the south. Some schools offer it as campus education, which is in the traditional form, while others give it as distance learning mainly with the help of various types of IT support.

The teacher training programme consists of three segments:

- general education studies comprising 90 ECTS credits, which are compulsory for all students. Consists of the central knowledge and interdisciplinary studies teachers require. At least 15 ECTS credits must consist of a placement activity.
- one or more focuses corresponding to at least 60 ECTS credits (studies in subjects or subject fields). At least 15 ECTS credits per focus must consist of a placement activity.
- specialisation (studies that broaden or deepen) corresponding to at least 30 ECTS credits. The specialisation can consist of in-depth studies in a previously studied field, broadening of a closely related subject field or supplementation of a subject field.

To earn a teaching degree an independent thesis must be written of at least 15 or 30 ECTS credits, depending on the length of the programme. The degree is awarded on the basic or advanced level depending on the number of acquired credits, required in-depth studies of a particular subject or required extent of studies on the advanced level. A degree on the advanced level qualifies the degree-holder for masters or doctoral studies in the field. A degree on the basic level requires further studies on the advanced level to fulfil this qualification.

The part of the course that is carried out as a placement activity is aimed to provide practical experience of the profession and perspectives on the theoretical studies and to prepare the student for his or her future career.

The programme leads to a teaching degree with an age and subject profile reflecting the choice of focus and specialisation. The basic conditions for receiving a teaching degree are regulated by the Degree Ordinance, which is a supplement to the Higher Education Ordinance. Each institution then specifies requirements of its own within the framework of the Degree Ordinance. These requirements vary from institution to institution, and thus the structure and design of teacher training at Swedish academic institutions offering teacher training differs greatly. This makes a national comparison difficult.

After receiving a teaching degree, the teacher can go on to higher education to obtain a degree as a special needs teacher or educator.

At present Swedish special needs education teacher programmes have two specialisations, designed to offer in-depth knowledge of either language development or mathematics development and effective teaching methods that stimulate pupils' proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics at an early stage. The programme comprises 90 ECTS credits and the prerequisites are a teacher's degree and additional in-depth studies of at least 60 ECTS credits in the subjects of Swedish or mathematics.

Training to become a special needs educator is also a second-cycle course offered to teachers who have obtained a degree and have at least two years' experience of the profession. The programme extends over three terms (90 ECTS credits). The overall objective is for the programme to lead to independent work as a special needs educator for children and pupils in need of special support. Special needs educators



often work on a broader basis than special needs teachers, giving guidance and advice, for instance, to other teachers.

Once the prerequisites are fulfilled, the teacher may continue up to a master's or doctoral degree. Teachers who become principals must take compulsory education in that position. Other school leaders may take this training on a voluntary basis as well. There are other kinds of school management programmes on the academic level, for instance for teachers who are interested in other positions within school management.

A new teacher training programme – The 'Best in Class' Bill of Teacher Education

As mentioned, a Government bill for a new initial teacher education programme was decided by the parliament in April 2010. In the bill the Government proposes that today's teaching degree should be replaced with four new professional degrees, namely a preschool degree, compulsory school degree, subject teacher degree and vocational teacher degree. In the following we will focus mainly on the new programme for teachers in the compulsory school, which partly covers the compulsory school programme and partly the subject teacher programme.

Compulsory school degree with a focus on preschool class and Years 1–3

The proposal is that this focus will comprise 240 ECTS credits. The programme would give teachers broad knowledge and skills for teaching most subjects. The Government proposes that knowledge of the development of reading and writing and advanced studies in mathematics for younger children should be a significant part of the skills for these teachers.

Compulsory school degree with a focus on Years 4–6

This focus would also comprise 240 ECTS credits. The Government hopes to intensify demands on future teachers for these years regarding both the extent and depth of the subjects. Studies of Swedish, Mathematics and English would be compulsory, while some of the subject studies would be optional.

Subject teacher degree with a focus on Years 7–9

The proposal is for this focus to be longer than the two above and to correspond to 270 ECTS credits, of which 195 would be in subjects. The focus gives the teacher the skills to teach three subjects. Teacher students will be able to choose from a limited number of subject combinations that are expected to meet the needs of the schools.

Special needs teacher degree

The Government feels there is considerable need for teachers with qualifications to teach at Special Programmes for pupils with learning disabilities or cognitive disabilities and at special schools. For this reason they have proposed that the special needs teaching programme is expanded to include work with deafness or hearing impairment, visual impairment, severe language impairment or intellectual disability. This measure is intended as training for the special needs that pupils who have the right to education in this kind of school may have.

Special needs educator degree

The Government intends to investigate the future of education for special needs educators.



Inclusion in the new initial teacher training programme

In the following we will study the text of the bill regarding the theme of this project, namely 'teacher education for inclusion'. On the whole, the bill coincides with the Government investigator's proposals, although large parts have been omitted. For example no explicit question is posed as to whether special needs issues should be included in the new teacher education. On the other hand, reference is made to the investigator's report where the subject was brought up. Nor are the concepts of 'inclusion', 'integration' or 'a school for all' mentioned in the text. However the word 'knowledge' is used over 200 times. This emphasis on the education's responsibility regarding the knowledge-conveying part of the teaching profession can be said to correspond to the criticism of the Swedish school system that has come forth as a reaction to poorer results in international measurements of knowledge.

The section that is the most interesting regarding the theme of this project however is the one that deals with special needs skills. In the bill the Government states that against the background of increasingly inferior results in the Swedish schools, it is urgent that the schools' means of supporting pupils who have a hard time handling the knowledge demands be strengthened. For this reason, special needs education needs to be reinforced so that it would be possible for future special needs teachers, beyond specialisations of Swedish and Mathematics, to choose specialisations in the fields of deafness/hearing impairment, sight impairment, severe language impairment or intellectual disability.

Naturally it is very difficult to say anything with certainty about what the prospective teacher education programme will look like. Criteria for granting degrees will be presented later in the spring of 2010 and qualification descriptors for the various teacher and preschool degrees have not been established at the time of writing for this report. However we already see that questions related to pupils who need extra support and help have only expressly been mentioned in the bill in connection with the work of the special needs teacher, where it is further stated that every school and preschool teacher needs to be observant of pupils and children in need of special support and to be able to ensure them the right kind and right extent of support. Moreover, the bill says, there is a need of school teachers and preschool teachers who have advanced skills in special needs education.

The bill that was the basis for the present teacher education (Gov. Bill 1999/2000:135) also underlined how important it was for the mainstream teacher to have the necessary skills to give support to those who needed it as part of his or her normal teaching but that experts might also need to be called in. Besides special needs as included in the general education studies, it is possible to study special needs education as both a focus and a specialisation. In the text of the bill from 2000 it was made clear that special needs education on the compulsory school level should have a perspective of inclusion, which is that such activity should be closely tied to the other activities of the class. This close relation is not as readily visible in the present bill.

An issue causing lively discussion at the country's teacher training institutions this spring has been the position of special needs education in the new initial teacher training programme. In the 2001 programme, it was considered important that the general education studies should contain segments dealing with special needs and inclusion. In the new teacher education, general education studies are to be replaced by a so called core of educational sciences. Segments on special needs and inclusion are not as clearly outlined in the 2010 bill. The bill refers however, to the proposal of the preparatory report regarding areas that should be included in the core of educational sciences, such as segments on special needs education. The bill also omits explicit mention of the



knowledge required by prospective teachers in catering for pupils with various kinds of disabilities. The Government especially mentions however that accessibility and the rights of pupils with disabilities should have a given place in the core of educational sciences.

The question of how prospective teachers should be equipped to handle their assignment in 'a school for all' is something that mobilises interest. The Swedish Association of Visually Impaired Youth (*Unga Synskadade*) and the Swedish Organisation for Hard of Hearing Young People (*Unga Hörselskadade*) refer in an article in the daily newspaper *GöteborgsPosten* (2010) to the fact that all teachers at some time during their careers will encounter pupils with disabilities. From this perspective, they feel it is important that teacher education provides solid knowledge of how to create the best possible school situation so that these pupils can remain in their regular classes or groups.

Definition of inclusion

A review of the Swedish policy documents for the field of education, that is the Education Act, the ordinances for the different types of schools, and the curricula documents, shows a total absence of a Swedish translation for the word 'inclusion' (*inkludering*). Even in scientific and popular science texts, the term is used only rarely. Searches in the Swepub (National Library of Sweden) or ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre) database yield a total of just over 20 matches, which indicate the limited occurrence of the concept of inclusion. A more common use is that of the catchphrase 'a school for all' – an expression that was coined at the time of the introduction of the 1980 curriculum for the compulsory school. It is interesting to note that the Scandinavian countries, despite great similarity in their ambition to create a comprehensive school for all children and young people, use different terms to express these ambitions. In Norway the word *inkludering* is used in official policy documents, while in Denmark they speak of 'den rummelige skole' (*the spacious [all-including] school*), and in Sweden, as mentioned, 'a school for all'.

The Swedish Education Act² clearly stipulates that Swedish schools must be accessible to all:

All children and young people shall, regardless of gender, geographic residence or social or economic circumstances, have equal access to education within the public system of schools for children and young people. Education in all schools shall be equal, wherever it is offered throughout the country.

The schooling should give pupils knowledge and skills and, in co-operation with their families, promote harmonious development into responsible individuals and members of society. Special consideration of pupils in need of special support should be included in the education. (Swedish Statutes 1985:1100)³

In the same way, the Compulsory School Ordinance emphasises that it is in the regular classroom that support should take place. The ordinance (Swedish Statutes 2000:1108) provides guidelines for various kinds of support measures:

Special support should be given to pupils who need special education. Such support should be given primarily in the class or group that the pupil belongs to.

²In March 2010 the Government presented a bill to Parliament for a new education act (*Den nya skollagen - för kunskap, valfrihet och trygghet (Prop. 2009/10:165)*, (*The New Education Act – for knowledge, freedom of choice and security (Gov. Bill 2009/10:165)*).

³ Translated for this report.



If there are special reasons, this support may be given in a special tuition group. After consultation with the pupil and the pupil's legal custodian(s), the board may make a decision regarding placing the pupil in such a special group.⁴

Inclusion as a guiding principle is thus well established in Swedish school legislation even if the term 'inclusion' is not used explicitly. Traditionally, at least since the early 1960s, the concept of the comprehensive school has rarely been called into question and it may well be that the principle of inclusion has come to be regarded as more or less self-evident.

Fundamental principles with a bearing on teacher education in Sweden

The Eurybase Report 2.3 briefly discusses the fundamental principles of the equal right to education in reference to the Higher Education and Education Acts. Together with related ordinance texts, these principles form the basis for the content of teacher training and are described as goals for the B.Ed. degree in the above-mentioned qualification descriptor. In addition, during 2010 Parliament will be passing a resolution on a new Education Act aimed to come into effect in 2011. Further to this, a few points of the Higher Education Act will be changed in connection with the introduction of the new teacher education, provided that Parliament passes the requisite resolutions. It is impossible at present to say anything about the exact consequences of these changes for the content of teacher education.

3. Initial Teacher Education

a. Entry to teacher education

Students who wish to be admitted to a teacher training programme in Sweden must meet both general and specific entry requirements. It is also possible to fulfil these requirements through a so called review of prior learning.

The basic principle is that anyone who has a complete leaving certificate from an upper secondary school programme and has received a grade of no lower than 'Approved' in the A and B (basic and intermediate) courses in Swedish, Mathematics and English meets the general requirements. For the subjects the teacher student intends to specialise in, specific entry requirements and thereby a grade of 'Approved' at a higher level are required.

Under certain circumstances an applicant may be regarded as eligible for studies even when he or she does not formally meet the entry requirements. This may be the case for instance if the academic institution feels that the applicant would be able to complete the programme because of his or her previous knowledge and experience. Many applicants who have been judged eligible based on prior knowledge do not have sufficient merit rating scores, which may mean they should sit the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test to participate in the admission procedure.

Apart from the entry requirements mentioned above there are no other requirements for prospective teachers of Years 1–9, even if their future assignment will come to involve groups of pupils from ethnic minorities or pupils with school-related problems of one kind or another. For admittance to training as a special needs teacher or educator, the requirements are stricter, namely completed teacher training, a bachelor degree and three years of experience.

b. Models of initial teacher education

As mentioned above Swedish higher education and thereby Swedish teacher education as well are not regulated in detail by the State. A consequence of this relatively decentralised

⁴ Translated for this report.



system is that the educational programmes, even those leading to the same degree, may differ greatly from institution to institution. There are thus no national guidelines or recommendations to lead the way in teacher education, which limits us in our descriptions of aspects such as content, method, evaluation, examinations and 'best practice'. Indeed it is likely that there are as many ways of describing the plan and content of teacher training in Sweden as there are higher education institutions for teacher education, of which there are 24. One example is provided below to illustrate key points.

c. The initial teacher education curriculum

As discussed above, a teaching degree is granted on the bachelor or master level, depending on the number of credits and the level and extent of studies in a particular subject or field. A Bachelor of Arts in Education (B.Ed.) or master's degree (M.Ed.) is granted to those who have completed the course requirements of a total of 210–270 ECTS credits (3½–4½ years of full-time studies).

In the qualification descriptor the specifications for the prospective teacher are given under the headings *Goals, Knowledge and understanding, Skill and ability, Judgement and approach* and *Independent project (the degree project)*. In the following only the parts that are of relevance for work in the compulsory school will be discussed, for which reason the text has been revised and somewhat shortened.

Goals

For the B.Ed. degree, the student should display such knowledge and ability as is needed to fulfil the goals of the school and to contribute to the development of the school according to prevailing regulations and guidelines.

Knowledge and understanding

For the B.Ed. degree, the student should:

- display such knowledge of the subjects or fields as is required for the activity intended by the education, including knowledge of the scientific basis for the subject or field and relevant methodology practised within the activity, and have knowledge of current research issues;
- display knowledge about learning and teaching;
- display knowledge of the significance of literacy and mathematics for children's knowledge development, and
- display knowledge of the significance of the equality perspective in education and in presenting the subject material.

To teach and carry out other educational activities in the preschool, preschool class and compulsory school, the student should also

- display superior knowledge of how to learn to read and write and how to learn basic mathematics.

To teach Years 1–9 and upper secondary school, the student should also

- display superior knowledge of how to analyse and judge pupils' knowledge development and good knowledge of how to grade pupils.

Skill and ability

For the B.Ed. degree, the student should:



- display the ability to transform knowledge of subjects or fields and about learning and education that are required by the activity intended by the education so that all children and pupils will learn and develop;
- display the ability to convey and implant the basic values of society and democracy;
- display the ability to convey, implant and apply the prevailing set of rules and regulations aimed at preventing and counteracting discrimination and other degrading treatment of children and pupils;
- display the ability to independently and with others plan, carry out, evaluate and improve teaching and other educational activities and take part in the administration of such activities;
- display the ability to analyse, assess, document and evaluate pupils' learning and development in relation to the goal of the activity and to inform and cooperate with parents and other legal guardians;
- display the ability to apply information technology in education and understand the importance of various media's role in such, and
- display the ability to critically and independently make use of, systematise and reflect on one's own and others' experiences and relevant research findings in order to thereby contribute to the advancement of the profession and the development of knowledge within one's subjects or fields.

For the M.Ed. degree the student should also:

- display a more advanced ability to critically and independently make use of, systematise and reflect on one's own and others' experiences and relevant research findings.

Judgement and approach

For the B.Ed. degree the student should:

- display self-knowledge and empathic ability;
- display the ability in the work of teaching to make judgements based on relevant scientific, social and ethical aspects, with especial consideration of human rights;
- display the ability to maintain a professional approach to children, pupils and their guardians, and
- display the ability to identify a need for one's own further knowledge and to develop one's skills in the field of education.

Independent project (the degree project)

For the B.Ed. degree of 210 ECTS credits, the student shall have completed an independent project (the degree project) within the framework of the course requirements and of at least 15 ECTS credits.

For the M.Ed. degree of 270 ECTS credits, the student shall have completed an independent project (the degree project) within the framework of the course requirements and of at least 30 ECTS credits or two such projects of at least 15 ECTS credits each.

Comments

In the Swedish model of teacher education, it is through the Degree Act that the state can regulate the goals to be reached by students during their training to obtain a teacher's degree. As we can see in the above outline of the qualification descriptor for



teachers at the compulsory school level, high scholarly demands are put on prospective teachers. Moreover we see that demands are put on teachers' subject knowledge as well as on their knowledge of the other tasks of the teaching profession. As mentioned in the introduction, it is then up to each higher education institution to decide how to organise the content and the testing to be applied in the different subject areas. The state then has the right to examine the extent to which the institution has fulfilled the goals of the Act.

Regarding the teacher education that will begin in 2011, no qualification descriptors have as yet been established, making it impossible to discuss how the content of the Government bill will be concretised.

Inclusion and the Degree Act

As is evident about the qualification descriptor above, prospective teachers are to gain the necessary skills and abilities through their basic education to allow them to promote 'the learning and development of all children' in their profession. Moreover we see that the teacher is to work to counteract discrimination and degrading treatment and to take social and ethical aspects, especially including human rights, into consideration in their teaching.

Thus, the fundamental principles of the inclusive approach have been written into the Degree Act, albeit described in a general way.

The paragraph above presented the parts of the Degree Act that are relevant to the 2001 teacher training programme. Apart from what is evident there regarding the ability of prospective teachers to work with others, above all with parents, the education also touches upon co-operation with Government authorities, support resources and other professional categories. An important element of co-operation with parents is taking part in so called development discussions that take place once a term. During these discussions both the pupil's advancement of knowledge and his or her social development are discussed in relation to the goals of the curriculum and course syllabuses. The guidelines from The National Agency for Education show that the development discussion should provide a coherent picture of the pupil's development in all subjects. It is important to stress that the development discussion not only aims at pointing out the pupil's strengths and weaknesses and how the pupil can work to improve his or her skills, but also to discuss how the school can support and stimulate the pupil's further development.

The development discussion is closely linked to the document called the Individual Development Plan (IDP), which aims at supporting the pupil in his or her learning and social development. The IDP contains not only written assessments of the pupil's development of knowledge but also a plan for how the school can help the pupil advance as far as possible in the direction of the national goals.

The IDP should also present what the pupil and parents can do and should take responsibility for. The written assessments should put the pupil's knowledge development in relation to the educational plan that is the basis for the education.

d. Attitudes and values in initial teacher education

The Degree Act (see above) specifies that the teacher is to work to counteract discrimination and degrading treatment and to take social and ethical aspects, especially including human rights, into consideration in their teaching. Thus, the fundamental principles of the inclusive approach have been written into the Degree Act, albeit described in a general way.

e. Teaching practice

See example below



4. Competences, assessment and accreditation (3e, 5a, 5e)

As mentioned above, Swedish teacher education is goal-based, this means that higher education institutions have a great deal of freedom in forming the education using the goals as their starting point.

The implementation of the school's activities is a concern for the country's municipalities and independent schools, while the state has a more overreaching responsibility through national policy documents such as the Education Act, the regulations for different types of schools, the curricula and the course syllabuses as well as the governmental supervision carried out by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate.

On the national level there are also the recommendations and support material prepared by the two central school authorities, the National Agency for Education and the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, to which teachers, other school staff and teacher students can turn for help and advice.

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools offers advice and support regarding the pedagogical consequences for children, young people and adults with disabilities. Their support is available to staff in the public school system and independent schools that are under governmental supervision.

The support may involve:

- guidance regarding individual pupils or groups of pupils;
- investigations surrounding deafness/hearing impairment in combination with intellectual disability, deaf blindness, sight, speech and/or language impairment;
- information about accessibility to adapted textbooks and teaching aids for children, young people and adults with disabilities;
- skills development;
- dissemination of information to school boards and parents, and
- participation in the development of special needs education.

The National Agency for Education can also give support on a comprehensive level to teachers and head teachers in matters that concern the exercise of the teaching profession, including support material in several areas of special needs education. In addition, the National Agency for Education can help schools in striving to meet the national goals. According to the National Agency for Education (2010) this may concern:

- general development efforts to support areas such as mathematics, language and literacy, as motivated by weaknesses and problems that have been identified in national and international studies;
- skills improvement such as the 'Boost for Teachers' programme (Government funding for continuing teacher training and a training programme for head teachers/school leadership);
- spreading knowledge of research and knowledge-based methods and experiences of importance to school managers and educators.

The National Agency for Education also has the sector mandate for the Swedish handicap policy, which means that they have the responsibility for seeing to it that pupils with disabilities are given the same right as other pupils to full participation in school. This is especially important in the section about the task of the governmental Schools Inspectorate, whose efforts are formulated as follows:



The activities should be characterised by an inclusive approach and constitute a secure environment where no degrading or discriminating treatment takes place. These basic terms should apply to all children and pupils regardless of whether they have a disability. With this as the starting point, the Schools Inspectorate should work to identify, observe and call attention to circumstances and obstacles that affect the fulfilment of the rights of children and pupils with disabilities. The work of the Schools Inspectorate is thereby an important element in the national task of achieving the policy goals regarding disabilities, namely that people with disabilities should be fully participatory in society and that equal living conditions should prevail for all. (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2009)⁵

In summary we can conclude that the inclusive approach is a bearing principle in the Swedish educational system even if it is not always explicitly outlined. The Schools Inspectorate has approximately the same function of supervising the public school system as the NAHE has for supervision of universities and other academic institutions. We can thus conclude that the inclusive principle is clearly outlined in the tasks of the Schools Inspectorate. Similar clear-cut wording for the NAHE does not exist.

5. Teacher educators

See example below

6. Quality assurance and follow up of new teachers

As mentioned above it is the National Agency for Higher Education that has the overall responsibility for evaluations and quality assessment of higher education in Sweden. During the first decade of the 21st century teacher training was evaluated twice, once in 2004 and once in 2008. The 2004 evaluation involved both the teacher education reform itself (the parliamentary resolution of 2000) and the quality of the education. Parts of the criticism were fairly harsh, pointing out among other things excessive freedom of choice for students, insufficient structure and clarity as well as inadequate ties to research.

During the follow-up evaluation in 2008 the criticism was still rather sharp. This time, the reform itself was not included in the study, only the implementation and content of the programme. Several areas that had been criticised four years earlier were still considered in need of improvement and the right to grant a degree was called into question in ten of the 26 institutions. The most common criticism involved the percentage of teacher educators with doctoral degrees, which was considered far too low. This was also the point in terms of improvements that was easiest to measure, which in turn meant that none of the criticised higher education institutions had their right to grant degrees suspended.

Interestingly, neither of the reports makes any mention of the field of special needs or how prospective teachers should learn to work in inclusive environments. This indicates that the priorities of the institutions in dealing with the authorities' criticism were not concerned with the field of inclusion.

It might be interesting in this connection to study another evaluation, namely the review of second-cycle courses for special needs educators carried out in 2006. All the institutions offering this special needs education were included in the evaluation. In her comments to the expert report, the director-general of the NAHE gave a summary in which she took up the question of inclusion. She wrote:

In the Degree Ordinance for general teacher training there is no mention of how the teacher should work from the perspective of inclusion nor that the teacher should have knowledge of how to work with children in need of special support. /.../ This makes it

⁵ Translated for this report.



impossible for teachers, based on the present Degree Ordinance, to demand that teacher training should include the special needs skills required to meet pupils with special needs. (NAHE, 2006, p. 11)⁶

As expressed in the relatively brief text of the Degree Ordinance for general teacher training the NAHE thus comes to the conclusion that teachers in Swedish schools neither need to work with principles of inclusion nor even to know anything about working with pupils who have special needs. This interpretation appears odd in face of the emphasis of the Degree Ordinance on how prospective teachers should have the skills and ability needed for 'all children and pupils to learn and develop' (SFS 1993:100). Naturally 'all' includes pupils with a need of special support.

7. Representation from minority groups

There are no specific regulations concerning representation of minority groups in ITE. However, the Higher Education act stipulates that an aim is to increase the number of students with other ethnic origin than Swedish in all study programmes. This also applies to students with disabilities who have the right to support in order to facilitate their studies.

8. Policy into practice examples

In the following we will present the 'case study' mentioned above, namely teacher education at Borås University College. It is important to remember that the descriptions presented are from only *one* of the country's teacher training programmes and that general conclusions can thus not be drawn from the example. At the same time, it is unlikely that the teacher programme at Borås University College differs substantially from other programmes.

A proviso that is worth pointing out however is that teacher training in Sweden is not only offered at universities but at other academic institutions as well. Today, the differences between these seats of learning are not as prominent as they once were, as many institutions that are not officially universities now conduct research and in some cases even have the right to grant doctoral degrees. A difference that is worth pointing out however, is that teacher training at 'real' universities is carried out in conjunction with more departments and faculties than is the case at the smaller institutions. For example at the University of Gothenburg, which is one of the largest in Europe, more than 30 departments at 7 faculties are involved in teacher training, while at most non-university institutions, only one department takes care of the educational programme. The latter reflects the situation at Borås University College, where the Department of Education manages the entire teacher training programme. The advantages of education at non-university institutions include closeness, simple logistics and short paths to decisions, while the universities often exhibit higher scholarly competence. It is not necessarily the case however that such competence is utilised at its maximum in teacher training.

At Borås University College, teacher training with a number of different focuses is offered. In the following however, we will concentrate on education for teaching at the compulsory school level (Years 1–9). Four teacher educators at the programme were interviewed: A., who is in charge of the placement training part of the programme; B., who is in charge of one of the courses in general education studies; C., who is responsible for subject of didactics, especially in mathematics; and D., who works mainly with issues surrounding special needs education. These teachers have been chosen to reflect different parts of teacher training. In the following, the facts presented have been taken from the website of

⁶ Translated for this report.



Borås University College as well as the publication *Mentorshandbok (Mentor's Handbook)* by Elisabeth Andersson and Ingamay Larsson (Andersson & Larsson, 2006).

Students' encounter with practice

The students carry out a total of 30 weeks of practice teaching in various schools that are relevant for the future exercise of their profession. A unique feature of teacher training in Borås is that they have a so called mentor programme. The education programme uses several work methods in the teaching, such as lectures, laboratories, study groups, seminars, placement training and excursions, to which Borås University College has added a special activity, namely the mentor group that has been part of teacher training since 1997. The mentor and the mentor group are a tool for teacher students in learning to be a teacher. The mentor is a teacher at the school who, alongside the exercise of his or her profession, is also a mentor to some 8–10 students. Mentorship implies following 'your' group throughout their training.

The mentor group provides students with the opportunity and time to reflect on their future roles in the profession and on their development during the course of the programme.

The object of the mentor meetings is to:

- focus on and make students aware of their personal development and social competence;
- strengthen and give continuity to practice teaching by making the interaction between practice and theory more lucid;
- provide the group with a forum for discussing practical experiences and addressing didactic issues and problems.

To achieve these goals the teachers-to-be are regularly encouraged to reflect on their upcoming role as professionals. The object is to develop an approach to learning and teaching that they can use in dealing with the changes that are constantly taking place in society and education. During their entire teacher training the students are urged to keep so called job journals, which is a kind of diary where they can keep notes about what it means to be a teacher and their own path to becoming one. The descriptions and reflections in their journals are then the basis for discussions in the mentor group.

In the interview, A. describes the mentor system in very positive terms. During practice teaching, teacher students have the opportunity to talk with their supervisor every day about their experiences. The meetings in the mentor group on the other hand give them the chance to discuss other aspects of the teaching role. The students are not dependent on their mentor and can therefore speak more open-heartedly about what they have experienced during their practice. According to A., the most common question from students is what they should do with pupils who are obviously not taking part in the class activity despite their physical presence in the classroom. As an observer when they are not themselves in charge of the teaching, they see how some pupils get 'forgotten' and are paid little attention by the teacher – that is by their supervisor. These are issues they can air in the mentor group without forcing anyone into a defensive position.

Another observation mentioned by A. is that there are often discussions in the mentor group about whether pupils with various problems should be allowed to remain in the classroom. No spontaneous statements are made by the prospective teachers regarding a desire or demand that these pupils should be somewhere else, for instance in a separate room with a special needs teacher. Practically everyone feels the inclusive approach is natural, which may be due to the fact that they themselves as a rule went to Years 1–9



during the 1990s, which perhaps was the period when the ideal of 'a school for all' was at its strongest.

A. also observed that teacher students worry about 'weak' pupils and the fact that they are not getting the stimulation they feel they need to develop. The widespread use of 'individual work' as a work method often meant that these pupils felt there was little point in trying to get help every time they encountered a problem in their assignment. Instead they just sat there waiting for the end of the lesson, a situation the student teachers strongly reacted to. These and similar phenomena during their placement training were subjects they could bring up in the mentor group and on a Meta level, making the inclusion discussion distinct.

A. called attention to the importance of close contact between the institution and the compulsory schools. Another emphasis was put on the necessity of adequate further education among mentors and supervisors and of their interest in the assignment. To qualify as a mentor you must complete a course of 7.5 ECTS credits, while similar qualifications are not required of supervisors. However the latter are invited to 'continuing professional development days' every term, at the institution.

Subject and general education studies

Included within the framework of general education studies at Borås University College is a course segment called 'special needs education perspectives', corresponding to 7.5 ECTS credits. This course strives to create a basic understanding of the role of special needs education in 'a school for all'. Questions of inclusion/exclusion and normality/deviation are central here, as are how special needs skills can be useful to the ordinary teacher. The course, which is obligatory, does not endeavour to teach the students special needs methodology or to give them in-depth knowledge of disabilities and their consequences. The latter may be regarded as a weakness however, not least against the background of the criticism from disability organisations in Sweden regarding the proposal for new teacher education referred to earlier in this report.

The above-mentioned freedom for institutions that offer teacher education to relatively independently plan their own programmes and courses as they please has meant that the question of inclusion is treated differently from institution to institution. The most usual scenario is for these issues to be discussed during the course on special needs education, which has provoked considerable discussion among course co-ordinators at teacher-training institutions throughout Sweden. Many feel there is a danger in letting these fundamental issues be treated in a single course. The risk, they feel, is that it will not be discussed at all during other courses. The alternative is to let the inclusion issue be a connecting thought running through all the courses, with the risk that the subject is made indistinct.

The best thing of course would be for all course syllabuses to contain a discussion of inclusion. This is not the case however at Borås University College and probably not at other institutions where teacher training is offered either. No calculated strategy for these central issues of education exists in present-day teacher training in Sweden. On the other hand there is nothing in the system to prevent teacher training programmes from deciding to introduce such a measure.

B. is the course co-ordinator for the main courses in general education studies. These studies, which provide an introduction to central subjects such as socialisation, knowledge and learning, are intended to give students knowledge and skills specific to the teaching profession. Educators who work with this and other courses that focus on the teaching profession per se have often themselves worked as teachers in the compulsory school.



The combination of experienced-based and scientifically based knowledge is vital for the credibility of their teaching.

Even if inclusion is not brought up specifically, B. feels that the central issue is how to reach each pupil with the content of the syllabus. The important thing is for everyone to be challenged at their own level and based on their own potential. In preparation for the placement training period, students receive instructions to especially study and seek contact with pupils who withdraw or show uncertainty. B. underlines that the perspective of inclusion is constantly present in this course, even if it is not verbalised. At the same time, she sees a risk in focusing all too strongly on pupils who have some kind of difficulty. Students sometimes protest against giving this particular group too much attention, which they feel happens at the expense of the needs of other pupils. At the same time it is precisely these kinds of issues that can help promote constructive and lively discussions of the overall goals of school education as formulated in the national curriculum, when confronted with reality in the classroom.

B. is very careful to point out the importance of impressing on students that not just one work method is right for everyone. Being a professional teacher means seeing the needs of all pupils and being able to meet them, using different methods.

C. is head of the mathematics courses for prospective teachers of Years 1–9. She taught on the compulsory school level for many years and is now involved in research and education in the area of basic teacher training. C. feels it is important to give students a perspective of inclusion in their subject-theoretical and subject-didactic studies. This calls for a varied subject content and suitable work and evaluation methods that ensure that all pupils develop an understanding of ideas and concepts. There is a concern that general studies does not really require special needs skills. Rather, it is every teacher's responsibility and central to teacher training in general. C. proceeds from the didactical questions where, how and why as well as for whom, that is for whom a certain content is suitable. The challenge is thus to adapt content and methods to the natural variation in the pupil group. This requires a conscious adaptation of the methods used to teach a subject area, a perception that the students need to come into contact with from the very beginning of their education. This makes it important to problematise the content, and different forms of representation need to be used to concretise various elements of mathematics teaching, for example, the concept of fractions. Another concrete example is division algorithm. The teacher has to be able to explain how it works and why, which can be achieved in many different ways. Often the teacher students bring with them a mechanical solution model that is not based on comprehension. The teachers-to-be need to learn to follow the pupils' thought process and to understand that they will learn to find 'real' problems when concrete examples are transformed into abstract thinking. In this way the same assignment can be given to all the pupils but with different expectations regarding solutions.

Mathematics problems, according to C., are a relative concept. Often pupils experience problems because the teaching has not taken their differences into account. According to C., this is especially evident when pupils are left on their own to do so called individual work. When a pupil gets stuck the teacher should be there to explain. A widespread way of solving this kind of problem is to transfer the pupil to a special needs class – a measure that far too rarely has the intended effect. Instead there is a risk that the contextual framework built up in the classroom is broken down into a situation where the pupil is subjected to one-on-one tuition, a type of educational spoon feeding.

This does not, in C.'s opinion, mean that pupils with severe problems in learning mathematics should always be taught together with other children, for example. There are



instances when the problems are so difficult that the pupil needs special support and it is the regular teacher who should blow the whistle that says this is necessary. The transfer should then be planned jointly by the class teacher and the special needs teacher.

According to C., it happens all too often that teachers of teacher education are blind to this kind of problem. They focus on their subjects and may have too much confidence in a belief that if the students just know their subject, then that will be enough. No teacher trainer, in C.'s opinion, should be allowed to teach without problematising the relation between subject content, subject didactics and methodology.

C. feels that the problems she experiences in letting a perspective of inclusion permeate mathematics education during teacher training probably also crop up in other subjects as well. What is required is for these questions to be discussed among teacher trainers in general, which she claims is actually happening today. Nonetheless there is room for improvement which would be easier to achieve, for instance, if the question of inclusion was naturally incorporated into the preparation of course syllabuses.

D. works with special needs in teacher training and has a background as a teacher of Swedish. The problems above regarding mathematics are similar to those that arise in the subject of Swedish. This may happen not only during the early period of learning to read but also in learning to read and write at higher ages. D., too, emphasises the danger of focusing too much on one's own work, which makes it harder to find room for reflection on texts and could also lead to a loss of the collective dialogue among teachers.

D. refers to an illuminating study by Sandström Kjellin and Wennerström (2006) of teachers who work with pupils with and without reading disabilities. The authors show that while the basic skills training is often the same for all pupils regardless of their real ability to read, the more advanced aspects, like reflecting on and discussing the assigned texts, are often left to the parents, as help during homework. According to D., this is an example of the negative consequences of teachers not having the ability to adapt tuition in the inclusive classroom to the pupil's varying potential for learning. For this reason it is extremely important for prospective teachers to be given the opportunity within the framework of their subject studies to problematise the demands of the inclusive classroom on their ability to differentiate content and teaching method. Otherwise there is a risk of referring the pupil to the special needs teacher for help in learning to read, which, although it may be justified in certain cases, can often be handled within the framework of regular teaching in the regular class.

D. sees a problem in not giving the issue of inclusion in teacher training a more distinct position in programme syllabuses and course syllabuses. The 'un-expressed' can easily lead to interpretations that obscure the proper understanding of 'a school for all'. Further, D. sees a problem in the fact that the inclusion issue in Swedish teacher training is often treated within the framework of a course in special needs. Inclusion is a superseding principle that bears on general education and not only special needs education.

Conclusions from the interviews with the four teacher trainers

All four teacher trainers take a perspective of inclusion for granted in their work with students. These students are going to be taking care of groups of pupils that will be highly heterogeneous, which puts high demands on their powers of initiative and knowledge about how to adapt their teaching to the pupils' varying potential for learning. They believe that this is a question of fundamental values that are deeply entrenched in the Swedish school tradition. At the same time they say that the inclusion issue is seldom discussed in the teacher trainer group, which may mean obstacles to developing common strategies for how to include it as an explicit element of teacher education. This becomes particularly



manifest in subject studies, where the question is not always how the subject content should be conveyed and adapted to allow all pupils to become familiar with it.

Placement training

With the introduction of the 2001 teacher training programme, the earlier concept of 'practice teaching' was replaced with the term 'placement training'. An important reason for the change was to underline the connection between the training that took place at the university/academic institution and the training that took place at the school itself. In the bill, it was written:

It is important that the placement training part of the education will be filled with a new, qualitative content that better develops the student's co-operation skills both vis-à-vis the teacher team and together with children and pupils. The placement training part of the programme should also help students to a higher degree to relate their subject knowledge to learning processes and the selection of subject material. Teacher education should be rooted more than previously in concrete and practical experiences; placement training should to a higher degree form the basis for the theoretical knowledge of the teacher programme. At the same time, subject-theoretical studies must be structured to accommodate the demands of the profession and to be better connected to the placement period of the education. (Prop. 1999/2000: 135 s. 11)⁷

The main point was that the theoretical content should be reflected in the concrete everyday workings of the school and that experiences from the school should be put in a theoretical context by connecting them to literature and lectures during seminars and group activities.

At Borås University College, the goal document for placement training stresses that this part of the education should be of use to the teacher student, the teachers at the school and teacher training in general. For the students, this means, among other things:

- knowledge and experience of and insight into the everyday workings of the school;
- admittance to and co-operation with a work team with the object of developing co-operation skills;
- support from theory and research but also theoretical studies based on tested experience;
- help in making the learning process visible;
- help in forming a secure and clear professional role/professional identity.

For the school:

- an opportunity for skills development;
- a close and more stable tie to the academic institution and thereby more benefit from the student teacher.

For the academic institution:

- deeper insight for teacher trainers into school development and change.

The emphasis on having the students meet 'reality' (rather than the 'unreality' at the universities) is central to the institution's teacher training. At the same time this goal puts high demands on the supervisors and schools that the students encounter. For this reason

⁷ Translated for this report.



Borås University College frequently invites supervisors and head teachers to seminars and lectures, which is greatly appreciated by all involved.

How can Swedish teacher training be developed to incorporate the inclusive aspect?

In this report Swedish teacher training has been studied from the perspective of inclusion. By way of conclusion we will summarise the challenges faced by teacher training and point to possible paths of development.

Focus on international knowledge measurements

Over the past few years international comparative studies like PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS have gained increasing significance. In the fields of mathematics and science, the results have been increasingly inferior, leading to steps to turn the trend. The establishment of the National Centre for Mathematics Education is one such example. Other examples are the Government's investments in continuing teacher education and the mandate given to the National Agency for Education to apply a special focus on mathematics and science-orientated subjects. In addition national tests have been introduced during Year 3 rather than not until Year 5 as before. To underline the importance of the subjects, so called elite classes have been started, for example in mathematics, and the upcoming Education Act will mean that for pupils with a special aptitude for a subject, schools will be permitted to arrange admission tests for special profile classes from Year 7.

An increasingly strong emphasis on the benefits of special needs education

Sweden has long been a forerunner in promoting special needs education as a means of pressing the inclusive school forward. Second-cycle courses and study programmes for special needs teachers were started 20 years ago, aimed at expanding the perspective of special needs education. The task of the special needs educator is to not only educate but to guide and supervise as well. Moreover training to be a special needs educator is on an advanced level and requires completed teacher training and professional experience.

Today we can see that the role of special needs teacher, with tuition aimed directly at pupils in need of special support, is once again in focus, side by side with preventive measures, such as special needs guidance and supervision for teachers and parents, being used to make it possible for a pupil to receive his or her education in the regular classroom. Today, it is the needs of the individual pupil that determine what type of tuition is best.

The perspective of inclusion

Sweden has a long tradition of paying regard to the perspective of inclusion. As discussed above it has practically become self-evident and is seldom a subject for debate. This applies not least to teacher training inspection in Sweden, where the issue of inclusion has not been the subject of any discussion during the last two inspections.

With a view to the targets of Swedish disability policy, among other things, the focus for pupils in need of special support seems to lie more on the learning environment than on the individual and his or her shortcomings. Educational research in recent years, Swedish as well as international, also points to the importance of the entire learning environment in analysing the work of pupils in achieving the knowledge goals.

Teacher education is of central importance in the development of the school of the future. Today's students will be active as teachers well into the 2050s. What these students take with them in the form of fundamental values and understanding of individual differences and the right to equal education is therefore of great significance. This is also manifested



in the significant number of international conventions and declarations signed by Sweden which take into account the issue of inclusive education.

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