

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes, with several dots highlighted in red. The dots are arranged in a pattern that roughly follows the shape of a map of Europe.

# Education Policy – A Swedish Success Story?

## Integration of Newly Arrived Students Into the Swedish School System

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- Immigration in Sweden began in the 1950s with labour migration, and continued into the 1980s sustained by a liberal refugee policy. Since then, policy has tightened considerably, but Sweden has nevertheless accepted more refugees than any other EU Member State in terms of its population. This was also the case in 2015, when Europe saw the largest amount of refugees seeking asylum since the Second World War.
- The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SSI) has identified factors in the area of school organisation and teaching in order to improve integration of newly arrived immigrants in schools. For example, each student's knowledge and experience is reviewed at an early stage so as to individually tailor education to specific needs and ensure that teachers are aware of individual pupils' language level, development and skills and what it means to learn a new language.
- Studies have shown that access to native-spoken language facilitates language development and learning in all school subjects, including Swedish as a second language. This is why students are entitled to education in their mother tongue, but participation is voluntary.
- In Sweden, education of newly arrived students is fostered by the same factors as education in general, such as good communication and cooperation between school boards and teachers and systematic quality control in order to ensure a positive educational environment for all pupils and not only ones that have arrived recently.



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Germany and Sweden are the European countries that accepted the largest numbers of refugees in 2015.<sup>1</sup> During the coming years, these refugees' children will join these countries' respective school systems. This report focuses on the measures taken by the Swedish school system to integrate newly arrived asylum-seekers and migrants into Swedish society. It outlines laws and regulations, as well as some of the research and policy discussions that underlie the Swedish way of handling questions concerning the integration of newly arrived students. State-funded education stands at the heart of Swedish integration discussions, since education is an important channel through which Sweden, like other states, seeks to foster its democratic system and values.

## Background

Sweden has a population of approximately nine million and is often characterized as a welfare state, where the state runs social services that are largely financed by taxes. This fact is of relevance to the present discussion, since both public and so-called »independent« schools are publicly financed. University education is free of charge.

Immigration began in the 1950s and 1960s with labour migration, and continued in the 1980s with the establishment of a liberal refugee policy. As in several other European countries, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s, when it became clear that many labour migrants would not be returning home, that serious policy discussions on immigration began. Sweden (like Britain) embraced multiculturalism, while others, such as France, promoted assimilation.<sup>2</sup> Immigration in the 2000s has been characterized by family immigration and asylum migration. Even though Sweden's immigration policy has tightened significantly over the decades, relative to the size of its population it accepted more refugees in 2013 than any

other country in the European Union.<sup>3</sup> This was also the case in 2015, when Europe experienced the largest amount of refugees seeking asylum since the Second World War. Most of these refugees come from Muslim-majority countries like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

The large influx of refugees in 2015 triggered a political debate about immigration. The Migration Agency, schools and social services found it difficult to take care of the refugees in the manner required by national standards, and border controls were enforced in November 2015. In July 2016 the Swedish parliament adopted a new law limiting the rights of asylum seekers to obtain residence permits and be reunited with their families. Under the new law asylum-seekers who are entitled to full protection receive temporary residence for three years, and those who are given the status of »subsidiary protection« receive a permit for thirteen months.<sup>5</sup> To receive Swedish citizenship a person needs to have lived in Sweden legally for five years with good conduct.<sup>6</sup> While naturalization in most European countries is contingent upon meeting certain criteria, this trend has not taken hold in Sweden. For instance, unlike many other European countries Sweden does not require proficiency in the national language. Political scientist Karin Borevi explains:

*The core idea of Swedish welfare state universalism is that integration presupposes that citizens enjoy equal access to a bundle of fundamental rights. Rights are particularly crucial for integration, as they provide the necessary integrative glue for the entire society. They enable individuals to regard themselves – and be regarded by others – as full and legitimate citizens.<sup>7</sup>*

3. [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Asylum\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics)

4. According to Eurostat more than half of the total number of asylum applicants in 2015 (about 53 percent) originate from Syria, Afghanistan, or Iraq. These were also, with different emphases, the most prominent nationalities applying for asylum in Germany and Sweden (Eurostat news release 44/2016 – 4 March 2016).

5. To gain permanent residence, asylum seekers need to have a job with an income that can support them. The new law also tightened the rules for family immigration. Only those with a residence permit for at least three years have the right to apply for family reunification. They must show that they can support themselves, their partner and any children, and have housing spacious enough for all. Asylum seekers granted subsidiary protection are not entitled to reunification with their family.

6. <http://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Becoming-a-Swedish-citizen/Citizenship-for-adults.html>

7. Borevi, Karin (2014): »Multiculturalism and welfare state integration: Swedish model path dependency«. *Identities, Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 21:6, 708–723.

1. The highest number of first time-applicants in an EU member state was registered in Germany: 441,800 first-time applicants, or 35 percent of all first-time applicants in the EU. The figures for Sweden were 156,100 or 12 percent. On the other hand, in relation to population the figures for 2015 were 16,016 first-time applicants per million inhabitants in Sweden and 5,441 in Germany. Compared with the previous year, the number of first-time asylum applications in 2015 increased 155 percent in Germany and 108 percent in Sweden. (Eurostat news release 44/2016, 4 March 2016).

2. Wieviorka, Michel (2014): »A critique of integration«, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 21:6, 633–641.

## Compulsory Schooling in Sweden

Municipalities provide pre-school (*förskola*) for children aged one to five years. Nurseries are subsidized by the state with the amount of municipal subsidy varying with the child's age and the parents' employment status (work, study, unemployed or parental leave for other children). All children are guaranteed a place in a one-year pre-school class (*förskoleklass*) before starting compulsory schooling. This year is designed to stimulate development and learning and provide a platform for future schooling. Although pre-school is not compulsory, almost all children in Sweden attend it. Swedish compulsory schooling consists of three stages: *lågstadiet* (years 1–3), followed by *mellanstadiet* (years 4–6) and then *högstadiet* (years 7–9). Children aged between six to thirteen are also offered out-of-school care before and after school hours. Compulsory schooling is comprehensive; all children go through the same kind of school from first to ninth grade. Following a reform in the 1990s, parents and children can choose between municipal and private tuition-free schools. The private ones are also funded by the state and must follow the national curriculum. Schools (whether independent or municipal) may adopt a particular profile, such as sport, culture or a particular educational theory. Some of the independent schools are religiously orientated.<sup>8</sup>

All pupils are supposed to receive support and encouragement to develop as fully as possible. Teachers are required to report to the head if a pupil is not expected to achieve the minimum proficiency requirements. The head is responsible for ensuring that the special needs are promptly investigated and addressed.

Schools have »pupil welfare teams« comprising a representative from the local school board, pupil welfare staff (school doctor, nurse, psychologist, counsellor), and special needs teachers. School health services are primarily preventive, focusing on health promotion.<sup>9</sup> There are regular health checks in childcare services and schools. Health services and psychologists are also available for staff, pupils and parents to consult.<sup>10</sup>

8. For more information about religious schools in Sweden, see for example Berglund, Jenny, 2015. *Publicly Funded Islamic Education in Europe and the United States*. Brookings Institution: Washington, D.C.

9. Pupils' progress towards educational goals should be supported, as per §25 of the School Law (2010:800); [http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800\\_sfs-2010-800](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800).

10. Cooperation between services other than the educational system, such as health care and training, has to be approved by and involve the parents.

Compulsory schooling, after-school centres and youth centers, as well as municipal childcare and pre-primary activities, are often part of the same organization under a single school board. To produce an all-round assessment of each pupil these activities are often integrated, with the staff working together. It is also common practice to address pupils' needs in close cooperation with their parents. The national curriculum underlines the importance of parental participation.

## Laws, Regulations and Recommendations

The starting point for integrating newly arrived children and teenagers into the Swedish school system is based on the legal requirement for compulsory school attendance:

- Children living in Sweden are obliged to attend compulsory school (Education Act, Ch. 7 §2).
- All children subject to compulsory schooling are entitled to free basic education in public schools (Ch. 7 §3).
- All students in elementary school, compulsory school, special school and Sami school participate in the educational activities, unless they have a valid reason to be absent (Ch. 7 §17).

This means that all young asylum-seekers have the right to attend pre-school and school immediately upon arrival. It is the responsibility of the municipality where the children live to ensure that they can attend school under the same conditions as other children in the municipality. This applies to pre-school, comprehensive school and upper secondary school. In order to have the right to attend upper secondary school, asylum seekers must join the school system before they turn eighteen.<sup>11</sup>

It is the responsibility of the guardian to ensure that the child attends school. Swedish law on compulsory school attendance differs from some other European countries where it is education that is obligatory, rather than schooling. One consequence of this is that home-schooling is nearly non-existent in Sweden. The municipality where the student resides not only has the responsibility

11. <https://www.skolinspektionen.se/sv/Rad-och-vagledning/Stallningstaganden/Skolplikt-och-ratt-till-utbildning/>

to ensure that students are able to attend school, but also to make sure that they all receive the guidance and encouragement they need to learn (also for personal development in accordance with the aims of education).<sup>12</sup>

Municipalities have a right to state funding to cover the costs of schooling for newly arrived students (such as asylum seekers). The Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) makes special agreements with municipalities that accept unaccompanied minors.<sup>13</sup> Having teachers with corresponding language-teaching expertise is a prerequisite for a school to receive and teach newly arrived pupils. The educational support students require includes access to mother-tongue education and counselling (see below).

## Immediate Access to Schooling

The Swedish National Agency for Education recommends that newly arrived children, young people and their guardians contact the assigned school without delay. It does not lay out in detail how quickly newly arrived children and young people who are not asylum-seekers should be received in the school system, but it should be done as soon as possible. Asylum-seekers subject to compulsory schooling should be assigned a place as soon as it is appropriate with consideration to their personal circumstances; those who are older should be offered a place in high school. This should be no later than one month after arrival.<sup>14</sup>

Initially the newcomers' knowledge and skills are assessed, as the basis for planning and implementing their future education. This assessment should be made as soon as possible, certainly within two months from the student being received into the school system. This initial assessment gives the newly arrived student an opportunity to show their strengths and abilities. The headteacher is responsible for making sure the assessment is carried out, and for ensuring that the the pupil receives education

12. <http://www.omsvenskaskolan.se/engelska/det-haer-aer-den-svenska-skolan/>

13. The municipality or independent school is also entitled to reimbursement of costs relating to education for newly arrived children. Only the municipality can apply for compensation from the Migration Agency, but in certain cases where an independent school has received a newly arrived student it is entitled to the same grants because municipal and free schools are supposed to operate under equal conditions. Independent schools in Sweden are privately run but publicly funded. They have to follow the national curriculum and obey the same requirements as any other school.

14. Ch. 4 §1a School ordinance (skolförordningen) and Ch. 12 §14 High school ordinance.

during the period of the assessment. Some municipalities choose to organize assessments of newly arrived students centrally, for example at a reception unit. But even if the assessment is organized centrally it is the student's regular headteacher who remains responsible. It is considered very important that this extensive responsibility of the headteacher, as well as how the assessment is done, is communicated to both students and guardians. When the assessment is done in the school it is the responsibility of the headteacher to choose who conducts it. It is an advantage if the assessment is done by, or together with, teachers in different subject areas.<sup>15</sup> The assessment should be done in the language that the student knows best, to permit them to show their strengths and weaknesses.<sup>16</sup> The assessment is conducted under guidelines developed by the National Agency for Education.<sup>17</sup>

The headteacher also has a responsibility to make sure that teachers and other school staff know and follow procedures for the initial assessment. When the assessment has been completed, it is the responsibility of the headteacher to place each student in the appropriate grade. Grade placements should be individualized, and not restricted to subject knowledge. Social factors also need to be taken into consideration.<sup>18</sup> Whether the assessment is done at a central reception unit or at the school, it is important that information about the student is transferred from the teachers conducting the assessment to those who will teach the student.<sup>19</sup>

## Language Education

Swedish as a second language should be organized for those pupils who need it.<sup>20</sup> Acquiring the linguistic knowledge required in school subjects takes time and

15. <http://www.skolverket.se/bedomning/bedomning/kartlaggningsmaterial>

16. Sometimes it is not possible to find a »mother tongue teacher« who speaks the language. The school may then assess the student in another language of which they have knowledge.

17. Link to the assessment guide: <https://bp.skolverket.se/web/kartlaggningsmaterial/start>

18. A student who arrives in Sweden late in his or her compulsory schooling and for this reason is not able to reach adequate linguistic proficiency is entitled to continue compulsory schooling for another two years after the end of compulsory attendance (which is also the right of all other students). Students may also choose to join an »introductory programme« in high school.

19. *Utbildning för nyanlända elever: Skolverkets allmänna råd med kommentarer*. Skolverket.

20. Ch. 10 §4, Ch. 11 §6, Ch. 12 §4 and Ch. 13 §4 school ordinance as well as Ch. 5 §§14–15 school ordinance.

conscious effort. To fully master a language for school requirements usually takes between six and eight years.<sup>21</sup> To facilitate this process it is important that teachers in *all* subjects feel a common responsibility to educate in a way that develops language and cognitive skills. Language development benefits from a teaching style based on the content of the curriculum and not focused on exercises with isolated words and phrases torn out of context. That way of working with language benefits all students, not only the newly arrived. It is not appropriate to focus one-sidedly on the student's knowledge of Swedish; subject knowledge is also important.<sup>22</sup>

The headteacher decides how the education of the newly arrived students should be organized. She or he may for instance decide that a student should be taught partly in a preparatory language group. While the amount of time spent in a preparatory group is not regulated, it is recommended that a newly arrived student studies at least one, but preferably several school subjects with her or his regular teaching group. The option of studying parts of school subjects with the regular teaching group and parts in a preparatory language group may also need to be considered. Which subjects, or parts of subjects, students study with their regular teaching group is decided by the headteacher on the basis of the results of the initial assessment.

However, it is not permissible for a student to receive all her or his education in a preparatory teaching group. The reason for this is that participation a regular teaching group contributes to involvement in school and society in a much more extensive form than if newly arrived students are taught in isolation from regular school teaching.

## Mother Tongue Education

In Sweden students have the right to mother tongue education.<sup>23</sup> Students with a mother tongue other than Swedish should be offered mother tongue education in school, but participation is voluntary.<sup>24</sup> Studies have shown that if

21. Skolverkets forskningsöversikt (2011): *Greppa språket – ämnesdidaktiska perspektiv på flerspråkighet*, p. 39.

22. Vetenskapsrådets rapportserie 6:2010 (2010): *Nyanlända och lärande – en forskningsöversikt om nyanlända elever i den svenska skolan*, p. 75.

23. This right is regulated by the Swedish language law: (Språklag 2009:600).

24. Both the study of school subjects in the mother tongue and mother tongue education can under certain conditions be implemented as distance teaching.

the mother tongue is used in parallel with Swedish, mother tongue education will promote language development and knowledge acquisition.<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to learn a new language quickly to the level required to understand literature, communicate in the classroom and properly understand written instructions and tests.<sup>26</sup> In other words, having access to the native language facilitates language development and learning in all school subjects, including Swedish as a second language.<sup>27</sup>

As part of mother tongue education, newly arrived students may receive *study guidance* in their mother tongue.<sup>28</sup> Study guidance here means mother-tongue support teaching of ordinary schools subjects. Several models for mother-tongue study guidance have been developed, including study guidance before lessons, during lessons or after lessons and study guidance in special language workshops.<sup>29</sup> This kind of study guidance is not only designed to enhance learning in different subjects, in Swedish, and in the mother tongue, but is also considered beneficial for identity development.

Where a student is able to demonstrate their knowledge in their own language this strengthens self-confidence and motivation. It also enables teachers to gain a broader understanding of the student's actual knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

## Teaching Values

As mentioned in the beginning of this report, state funded education can be understood as a means to foster certain values. In many countries religious education is seen as a core subject in this process and there is of-

25. Axelsson et al. (2002): *Den röda tråden – utvärdering av Stockholm stads storsatsning – målområde, språkutveckling och skolresultat*, p. 23.

26. Nilsson, Jenny, and Monica Axelsson (2013): »Welcome to Sweden...«: Newly arrived students' experience of pedagogical and social provision in introductory and regular classes. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 6(1), (pp.137–164).; Otterup, Tore (2006): *»Jag känner mig begåvad« – om flerspråkighet och identitetskonstruktion bland ungdomar i ett multietniskt förortsområde*. Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet; Wigg, Ulrika (2008): *Bryta upp och börja om: Berättelser om flyktingskap, skolgång och identitet*. Linköping: Institutionen för beteendevetenskap och lärande, Linköpings universitet.

27. Skolverket (2008): *With Another Mother Tongue*.

28. This right is regulated by Ch. 5 §4 in the School Ordinance.

29. *Studiehandledning på modersmålet – att stödja kunskapsutvecklingen hos flerspråkiga elever*. Skolverket.

30. Vetenskapsrådets rapportserie 6:2010 (2010): *Nyanlända och lärande – en forskningsöversikt om nyanlända elever i den svenska skolan*, p. 85; *Studiehandledning på modersmålet – att stödja kunskapsutvecklingen hos flerspråkiga elever*. Skolverket.

ten an implicit or explicit idea that religious education fosters tolerance and contributes to social cohesion.<sup>31</sup> Sweden's religious education contains such aspects, but also differs significantly from how religious education in many other European countries. It also differs from what most newly arrived students experienced in their countries of origin. In general, they either attended schools where they had confessional religious education according to their own faith, or had no religious education at all (this being treated as a matter for families outside the school system). The Swedish school subject of religious education (or religion education) is based on the study of different religions and is obligatory in all schools.<sup>32</sup>

All students are taught together and learn about different religions, non-religious outlooks, and ethics. This approach is designed to counter xenophobia and contribute to tolerance not only in the classroom but also in society as a whole.<sup>33</sup> Although several studies point to positive aspects of non-confessional religious education, recent research from Gothenburg university finds that the non-religious and atheist position is often considered as the neutral norm in Swedish schools, whereas being religious is often presented as problematic. Alongside this dominant discourse, the study also shows that Swedish Christian traditions and history are often used as a way of defining »us« vis-à-vis »them«. The »others« were largely religious people in general (also those who defined themselves as Christians) and Muslims in particular.<sup>34</sup> Both these discourses are problematic in terms of newly arrived students.<sup>35</sup>

Instead of having religious education carry the greatest responsibility for conveying values, this is the responsibility of all school subjects and all who work in schools. In terms of values, the national curriculum states the following:

*Education should impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based. Each and everyone working in the school should also encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person and the environment we all share.*

*The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are the values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility. Teaching in the school should be non-denominational.*

*The school should be open to different ideas and encourage their expression. It should emphasize the importance of forming personal standpoints and provide opportunities for doing this. Teaching should be objective and encompass a range of different approaches. All parents should be able to send their children to school, fully confident that their children will not be prejudiced in favor of any particular view. All who work in the school should uphold the fundamental values that are set out in the Education Act and in this curriculum, and clearly dissociate themselves from anything that conflicts with these values.<sup>36</sup>*

31. Strandbrink, Peter (2013): »There's no *sacrum* in it anymore: Revisiting formalist statehood and religious/civic education on Baltic-Barents borders«. *Religion, State & Society*, vol. 41, 2013:4: 394–417. Schreiner, Peter (2015): »Religious education in the European context«, in: Jenny Berglund / Thomas Lundén / Peter Strandbrink (Eds): *Crossings and Crosses: Borders, Educations, and Religions in Northern Europe*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

32. Berglund, Jenny (2013): »Swedish religion education – Objective but marinated in Lutheran Protestantism?«, *Temenos* 49:2, 165–184.

33. Berglund, Jenny (2015): *Publicly Funded Islamic Education in Europe and the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.

34. Kittelmann-Flensner, Karin (2016): Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden. Gothenburg university. <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/40808>

35. Several reports indicate that xenophobia and hate crimes are on the rise in Swedish society. Additionally, the Swedish media is often seen depicting Islam in a negative light, with Muslim immigrants regularly portrayed as backward and resistant to democracy, secularization and the separation of church and state. Moreover, for whatever reasons, a variety of research reports indicate that it is specifically Islamophobia that is on the rise in Swedish society (Otterbeck, Jonas, and Bevelander, Pieter. 2006. *Islamofobi: En studie av begreppet, ungdomars attityder och unga muslimers utsatthet*. Stockholm: Forum för levande historia; Larsson, Göran & Stjernholm, Simon (2014): *Främlingsfientliga handlingar mot trossamfund*.

Stockholm: Nämnden för statligt stöd för trossamfund (SST). <http://www.sst.a.se/sstsuppdrag/framlingsfientligahandlingar.42fd784f81498e7bc198f3809.html> This is, however, only one side of the story, since other studies show that over the years there has been a decrease in the number of Swedes who believe that the country contains »too many foreigners« as well as a steady show of support for the freedom of religion. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2015/01/07/swedens-protests-against-islamophobia-highlight-the-polarised-views-of-swedish-citizens-toward-muslims/>. A study concerning non-Muslims' views of Muslims and Islam found that when non-Muslim Swedes come to know their Muslim neighbors, many of their apparent prejudices and misgivings diminish, see [http://www.iza.org/en/webcontent/publications/papers/viewAbstract?dp\\_id=2977](http://www.iza.org/en/webcontent/publications/papers/viewAbstract?dp_id=2977) Also note that the proportion of Swedes who agree that »there are too many foreigners in the country« decreased from 52 percent in 1993 to 36 percent in 2009, see Borevi 2014, 719.

36. Curriculum Skolverket (2011): *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the leisure-time centre*. Stockholm: Skolverket. [www.skolverket.se/publikationer](http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer)

The use of the term »non-denominational« (*icke-konfessionell*) means that education should avoid prioritizing and a particular worldview and that pupils from all cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds should feel comfortable attending. This neutrality does not, however, extend to the realm of what is described as society's »fundamental values«,<sup>37</sup> the communication of which the national curriculum considers a primary task. This is one reason why religious education takes a study of religions approach and, in 1996, was made obligatory for all pupils.

In accordance with Sweden's Education Act, the general goals outlined above apply to both municipal and independent schools, including independent religious schools, and thus the »objectivity« of education is not to be impaired by indoctrinating or tendentious modes of discourse – whatever the school's profile.<sup>38</sup> This means that independent religious schools need to follow the national curriculum, but add a small number of hours per week of confessional religious education.<sup>39</sup>

The Education Act, which governs all education in Sweden, strongly emphasizes gender equality. The national curriculum states that gender equality should apply to and guide all levels of the education system. Over the decades this principle has been increasingly incorporated into education from pre-school level onwards, with the aim of giving children the same opportunities in life, regardless of their gender, by using teaching methods that counteract traditional gender patterns and roles.

37. On the one hand, teaching about religion in Sweden is meant to be neutral with respect to religious values; on the other hand, it is meant to be partial with respect to society's »fundamental values«. This raises the question of whether such an approach, while proclaiming neutrality, merely promotes the »religion« of secularism instead. For a discussion regarding a possible secularist bias in Swedish education see, for example, Osbeck, Christina, and Cöster, Henry (2005), June 14–18, 2005. *Is »Ground of Values« a Religion? About training world views in a non confessional school*. Paper presented at the 8<sup>th</sup> Nordic Conference on Religious Education: Religion, Spirituality and Identity, Helsinki, Finland. For a similar discussion concerning RE in Britain see, for example, Wright, Andrew (2004) *Religion, education, and post-modernity*. London & New York: Routledge Falmer. Schepeleern I Integration in Braat they will start an imam education. This imam education will entery courses in Islamic studies

38. (Johansson & Persson, 1996, p. 22). Throughout the history of Swedish education, »objectivity« has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. See, for example, (Englund, 1986, pp. 198, 315). See Berglund 2013 for a discussion on the objectivity of religious education in Sweden.

39. Independent schools (also called »free schools«) are fully funded by the state and must have the same educational aims and basic curriculum as the public schools (including non-confessional RE), although they are permitted to have a »profile« that is distinctly their own. In Muslim schools for example, this profile consists of one to three hours of Islamic RE per week plus an Islamic school ethos. See for example Berglund 2015 on Islamic education and Muslim schools in Europe.

The National Agency for Education has created guidelines for imparting fundamental values to newly arrived students and developing inclusive teaching strategies. One important principle is that difference is considered an asset, not a problem. Teachers need to communicate that the fact that all children and student groups are different has a value in itself, both for the creation of productive learning environments and for the democratic remit that schools have. Teaching must be adjusted to the students' specific circumstances and needs, building on each student's background, experiences, language and knowledge. To prevent discrimination and exclusion a norm-critical pedagogy is recommended, promoting reflection of the student's own and others' behaviour.<sup>40</sup>

## Debates, Obstacles and Some Solutions

### School Segregation

Over the past two decades school segregation has increased in Sweden. One of the reasons for this is growing residential segregation, but the possibility to choose a school has also fostered this development. Research by the National Agency for Education shows that the significance of the school a student attends has increased since the late 1990s. Schools with a larger proportion of students with favourable socio-economic backgrounds tend to produce better results even for students from less favourable backgrounds.<sup>41</sup> What friends a student makes in the classroom is significant. The conditions for learning Swedish may become difficult if students do not meet friends who speak Swedish as their mother tongue. Teachers' expectations of student performance can also be influenced by the general language level in the classroom.<sup>42</sup> An additional risk with greater school segregation is that experienced teachers and headteachers shun schools with larger proportions of students from so-called »difficult backgrounds«.<sup>43</sup>

The National Agency for Education has pointed out that if nothing is done to mitigate or compensate for increased school segregation there is a risk that weaker

40. <http://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/larande/nyanlandas-larande/undervisa-nyanlanda-1.237660>

41. National Agency for Education 2012, Chapter 6.

42. Hattie, J. (2009): *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses to achievement*. New York: Routledge. pp.121ff.).

43. IFAU 2014, the National Agency 2014 and 2015.

groups, such as newly arrived students, will be negatively affected, in terms of both school performance and future prospects.<sup>44</sup> If schools are going to continue to be unifying forces in a democratic and open society it is important that schools really become meeting places for students from different backgrounds and circumstances. The Agency is currently working to analyse developments both in terms of equity and performance and also fostering various development efforts to support the headteachers. To reverse the segregation trend headteachers must redistribute resources to where they are most needed.

### Uneven Distribution

Connected to the question of increased school segregation, newly arrived students are distributed very unevenly across the country. In more than half of Sweden's municipalities less than ten newly arrived students completed grade nine in 2014. In 2013/14 one school in three had no newly arrived students completing high school and more than one thousand schools had a maximum of two. Meanwhile, more than fifty schools had more than ten newly arrived students, and in twenty-six at least one in five students who finished ninth grade were newly arrived.

The problem of uneven distribution becomes even more evident when one examines which schools receive newcomers. The schools that receive the most newly arrived students generally have a parent population with below average education.<sup>45</sup> This means that a large proportion of the newly arrived students end up in schools that already face the greatest challenges, while very few go to schools that have the best prospects.

In Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, a majority of the newly arrived children and teenagers have ended up in a few schools located either near the asylum housing or in suburbs where many newly arrived people move to be close to relatives. These three cities are now trying to distribute newly arrived students to a broader range of schools to promote integration and linguistic development. Research shows that it is not sufficient to allocate

newly arrived children to schools outside the areas with large immigrant populations to achieve these sought-after effects. It has for example been shown that newly arrived students who attend schools with many children who have Swedish as their mother tongue have more difficulties making friends than newly arrived children who go to schools with many other new arrivals.<sup>46</sup>

Instead of simply distributing the newly arrived students to different schools, the receiving schools need to work actively to create social contacts. This can for example be done through mentor systems for the newly arrived students, and by ensuring that they are included in activities that are not directly connected to classroom activities, such as excursions and performances. There have unfortunately been cases where schools have separated newcomers from other students by for example serving them lunch at a different time, which mitigates against natural encounters.<sup>47</sup> Not only do teachers and other school staff need to be informed and prepared to engage with the new students; the students who are already attending the school and their parents also need to be brought in. This is important since a welcoming climate facilitates integration and learning. It is most certainly counterproductive to integration if the newcomers feel that other students do not really want them there.

### Lack of Adequately Qualified Teachers

The increase in the number of newly arriving students during 2015 has created a great demand for certain qualifications in schools and other parts of the public sector. The shortage has led to a situation where many unauthorized teachers are hired to teach (Swedish for immigrants SFI). It is not against the law to hire someone who does not have a teaching diploma, but the period of employment is restricted to one year. The government has tasked the National Agency for Education to run a campaign to attract more people to become SFI teachers. Apart from SFI teachers, there is also a lack of primary school teachers and it has become more common to try to get retired teachers to come in as substitutes.

44. National Agency 2015 p.10.

45. [http://www.lo.se/home/lo/res.nsf/vRes/lo\\_1366026587231\\_nyanlanda\\_samma\\_chans\\_pdf/\\$File/nyanlanda\\_samma\\_chans.pdf](http://www.lo.se/home/lo/res.nsf/vRes/lo_1366026587231_nyanlanda_samma_chans_pdf/$File/nyanlanda_samma_chans.pdf)

46. Bunar, Nihad (2010): *Nyanlända och lärande – en forskningsöversikt om nyanlända elever i den svenska skolan*. Vetenskapsrådets Rapportserie, 6:2010.

47. Bunar, Nihad (2010): *Nyanlända och lärande – en forskningsöversikt om nyanlända elever i den svenska skolan*. Vetenskapsrådets Rapportserie, 6:2010.

## Culturally Specific School Subjects, Physical Education and Health

Include the newly arrived young people has been a challenge for many schools.<sup>48</sup> This is an important challenge to deal with, since school is a central environment for many of these students. If the school situation is favourable, this is a good and important start to becoming integrated into Swedish society.<sup>49</sup> Statistics show that newly arrived students have difficulties coping with school work.<sup>50</sup> Alongside questions of language, school subjects are also culturally embedded in a way that might be difficult to grasp or accept. One way of facilitating their education is to address these culturally embedded aspects of schooling and provide suggestions for appropriate support measures to help students to cope better with school requirements in the different subjects. I will use the example of physical education and health (PEH) to illustrate this.

Physical education and health (PEH) is a school subject that many newly arrived students fail. Statistics from the National Agency for Education from 2012 to 2013 show that 31.6 percent of the newly arrived students in grade nine failed PEH.<sup>51</sup> Although PEH includes many challenges, it is also a subject that can help integration. Recent research from Örebro University shows that PEH is an important activity for many newly arrived students, offering opportunities, new contacts, improvement of language and other skills. The study also shows that many newly arrived students are unfamiliar with the culturally specific elements of Swedish PEH and that some aspects of their psychological and social health sometimes limit their participation. The study shows that many newly arrived girls feel limited by the fashion of tight and »sexy« clothing, and also shows cases where cultural norms have taught them not to be too physically active.<sup>52</sup>

In Sweden PEH is not gender segregated. Girls and boys are taught together at all levels. Swimming and dancing are sometimes mentioned by newly arrived immigrants as obstacles, since many students have no experience

of these.<sup>53</sup> Even if some activities are seen as difficult by both students and teachers, studies have shown that they can also become very important for the students if schools handle them with care and put extra effort into arranging classes in a manner that takes individual needs into consideration. One example of how this can be done is by gender-segregating swimming lessons (which is permitted in Sweden), giving those who have no experience of swimming extra lessons, and including dances where boys and girls do not have to hold each other or where girls can dance with girls instead of with boys.

## Success Factors

As we have seen, there are specific challenges and opportunities related to education for newly arrived students. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SSI) has therefore put extra focus on schools that educate newly arrived immigrants. In their inspection work, they have also identified factors that appear to influence schools and headteachers to work in a positive direction. The observations made by SSI coincide with what researchers have identified as success factors:

### Organization

- Clear structures for cooperation and communication between different institutions involved with newly arrived students within the municipality.
- A holistic approach to the newly arrived students that involves collaboration between teachers, pedagogical leadership from the headteacher, and the school's development plan. Strategies need to be developed collaboratively; responsibility should not be placed on individual teachers alone.
- Reviews of each student's knowledge and experience at an early stage so that education can be individually adapted.
- The transition from a special immigrant education group to a regular education group needs to occur as soon as the student has sufficient knowledge of Swedish. Special teaching groups can promote lan-

48. Bunar, Nihad (2011): »Multicultural urban schools in Sweden and their communities: Social predicaments, the power of stigma, and relational dilemmas«. *Urban Education*, 46(2).

49. Wigg (2008).

50. National Agency for Education (2014).

51. Huitfeldt, Åke (2015): *Passar jag in? Nyanlända ungdomars möte med idrottsundervisning*. Örebro Studies in Sport Sciences 22.

52. Huitfeldt 2015.

53. To pass PEH a student must be able to swim two hundred metres.

guage development, but if it takes too long before the student goes into regular education subject knowledge may be neglected.

- Education needs to be organized such that information about the student is not lost in the transition between special education and regular education group.
- To combat school segregation the municipality needs to redistribute resources (funding) between the schools. Active development work to improve achievement for all students is also needed.

### Teaching

- The results of the review of student knowledge and experiences need to be disseminated to all involved teachers so that they can adapt teaching accordingly.
- All teachers need to have knowledge about language development, expertise in what it means to learn a new language, knowledge about second language learning, and an awareness of what promotes language development.
- Study guidance should be given in the mother tongue to create the right conditions to learn the new language and acquire knowledge in other school subjects.
- Language learning takes place in all school subjects. Students who have not yet reached a basic level in Swedish should be actively encouraged to learn subject-specific Swedish by the subject teachers.
- Teachers need to trust in the students' abilities and set clear, high and achievable demands.

In conclusion it is important to note that education for newly arrived students is promoted by the same factors as education in general and that school boards, head-teachers and teachers need to communicate well and cooperate closely to jointly create a good education. Systematic quality control is crucial for school development to provide all students with the best conditions to learn and flourish. This benefits all students, not only the newly arrived.



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