

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate's annual report

Summary

ISBN: 978-91-989805-5-4

Dnr: 2024:5009

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The Swedish Schools Inspectorate's annual report summarises the Inspectorate's most significant observations during the year. Our risk-based approach is reflected in the picture of schools we present. Our experiences from this year show that certain deficiencies and areas for development follow a familiar pattern. In a number of cases, the deficiencies were serious and the Inspectorate had to take decisive action.

A MAJORITY OF THE SCHOOLS INSPECTED had deficiencies or areas for development. In a number of cases, the deficiencies were extensive and in several parts of the organisation, in which case the Inspectorate took decisive action.

Risk-based inspection does not provide a national picture of schools

It is important to emphasise at the outset that the Inspectorate does not, as a rule, carry out frequent inspections and we therefore do not claim to provide a representative picture of the situation in Swedish schools. The Inspectorate's selection for inspection is often based on risk, which itself is based on an analysis of statistics and incoming data. Coupled with our experience, not least from our monitoring of the independent school sector, we focus the review on areas and activities in which we see the greatest need. Working in this manner colours the picture we present, thereby placing greater emphasis on challenges and difficulties within schools. This also means that we direct our inspection efforts to where they will do the most good.

Deficiencies in work with support are a recurring problem, but the extent varies

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate's experience from this year's review shows that deficiencies and areas for development follow a familiar pattern in relation to previous years. We repeatedly highlight support work as a

common area of deficiency in schools. This is serious, but it is also important to add nuance to the picture. We see that these are sometimes more limited deficiencies that are relatively easy for schools to address. In some cases, these may be more limited deficiencies linked to documentation, for example. In other cases, the deficiencies are part of systematic and extensive weaknesses in the schools' work that can lead to pupil cases piling up or decisions on support measures being made on weak grounds. This may relate to schools at which a large number of pupils' support needs are not investigated despite clear signals and needs.

In a smaller group of the schools inspected, there are deficiencies that seriously impair pupils' ability to achieve their educational goals.

The guarantee to ensure early support for pupils does not seem to have had the desired impact

Getting the right support at the right time is crucial for pupils' ability to succeed in school. The results of the evaluation that the Inspectorate carried out on the early intervention guarantee are therefore disappointing. We can see that the early intervention guarantee does not provide support to a greater number of pupils, and that pupils' results in national tests in Swedish/Swedish as a second language have become lower in year 3 than before the guarantee. Furthermore, the guarantee is not being implemented as intended, and important prerequisites for the work are lacking. In light of this, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate finds the possibilities of achieving the intentions of the provisions of the early intervention guarantee to be limited.

Better challenges and stimulation for pupils who have made great progress is a common area for development

In terms of the school's core process, teaching, our most common assessment in planned quality reviews is that it is well functioning in many respects. The teaching is generally characterised by important aspects such as clear structure, variety and teachers having consistently high expectations of pupils. However, one of the most common areas for development in the schools reviewed concerns teachers' adaptations of content and approaches. More specifically, there is often a lack of conscious

efforts to challenge students who have made great progress in their knowledge development. When the Inspectorate identifies supervisory deficiencies related to teaching, these are usually related to the school organisers not doing enough to ensure that pupils are taught by qualified teachers.

Weaknesses in gender equality work at many of the schools inspected

At schools where the Inspectorate conducted planned quality reviews, head teacher leadership is the area in which the Inspectorate most often finds a need for development. As in previous years, it is usually a matter of the school's gender equality work needing improvement. Through the head teacher's leadership, schools have an important responsibility to work towards the gender equality policy goals, where women and men, girls and boys are to have equal opportunities in education, study choices and personal development. Despite this, large gender gaps in educational outcomes and safety persist.

Serious deficiencies in close to 40 schools

The situation at almost 40 schools has been so serious that the Inspectorate had to take decisive action and impose fines or revoke the school organiser's authorisation. These cases have included extensive and persistent deficiencies in teaching and in the work to support pupils. There have also been cases of schools with a very unsafe school environment. A few cases concerned school environments in which pupils were at risk of being subjected to anti-democratic influence or other serious deficiencies in the insight and suitability of the school organiser. In most cases, the situation at these 40 or so schools has seriously hampered the ability of pupils to achieve their educational goals.

It is not uncommon for there to be a broader set of problems in schools with serious deficiencies, something the Swedish Schools Inspectorate has observed over several years. These are schools where various deficiencies and challenges are interwoven and create negative spirals that school organisers may find difficult to overcome. Weak leadership from the school organiser and head teacher, lack of efforts to recruit qualified teachers, high

staff turnover and weak pupil health services are some examples of factors that can lead to compounded problems.

Extensive and serious deficiencies in access and quality have led to revocations

During the year, the Inspectorate revoked the authorisation of nine school organisers, affecting 11 schools and around 2,000 pupils. Among other issues, we found widespread deficiencies in teaching and greatly reduced teaching time. We have also found serious deficiencies in the insight and suitability of some school organisers. The deficiencies identified by the Inspectorate are serious, and our interventions affect the pupils. At the same time, it is necessary to take decisive action to combat unsuitable operators in the school system, and ensure that pupils are able to exercise their right to education.

Unequal conditions for learners in adult education programmes

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate notes major differences in the opportunities and conditions for learners in municipal adult education (komvux). Among other things, we see a lack of connection between the structure of the programme and the needs of the learners, and major differences in the teaching time offered. For example, we see significant differences in the quality of teaching in Swedish for Immigrants (Sfi) in adult education programmes. Similar concerns have also been raised previously by the Inspectorate. This year's inspections and surveys of adult education have largely confirmed the concerns that existed a year ago, which is why we emphasise the need to consider a comprehensive review of the regulations governing the quality and equivalence of adult education.

More authorisation application rejections with new regulation

The number of applications to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate to establish or expand an independent school is at the same level as in 2023, which means that it remains at a relatively low level. This could be attributable to demographic factors, among other reasons. This year's authorisation review process has resulted in more rejections due to a new

regulation requiring education to meet both pupil demand and labour market needs. This year's experience shows a discrepancy between applicants' wishes to start a higher education preparatory programme and the need for an increase in places in vocational programmes to strengthen the match between education supply and labour market needs. Our experience indicates that applicants have not sufficiently recognised or adapted to the new requirements.

Several deficiencies linked to inappropriate teaching and unauthorised denominational elements

During the year, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate identified deficiencies linked to the denominational orientation of schools. These include the fact that the denominational elements are not clearly delimited from the teaching or that pupils and guardians are not made aware that the denominational elements are voluntary. In some cases, we also found that the school's teaching is not factual, comprehensive or scientifically based, which is serious.

Risks of an open regulatory framework for international schools

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate has noted a slight increase in the number of applications to establish international schools. These schools constitute a special form of education outside the school system. Under school legislation, the Inspectorate does not have the possibility to carry out, for example, an ownership and management review or a review of the financial conditions of the international school organisers. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate is therefore more limited in both its authorisation and supervision activities, which we believe creates certain vulnerabilities in the education system. In light of developments in society and heightened security awareness and preparedness, the Inspectorate finds that the risks associated with foreign ownership of compulsory and upper secondary schools, as identified by the Swedish Defence Research Agency and others, may also apply to international schools in Sweden.

Important issues we raise with the Government

In this annual report, we highlight certain issues that may need further attention. These areas can strengthen the Inspectorate's effectiveness in

various ways, but the issues in question must be dealt with through political considerations and further investigation.

A comprehensive review of the regulatory framework for adult education should be considered

After another year of reviewing adult education and training equivalent to adult education, we see that the legislation, which is in parts open, complex and sometimes difficult to understand, is at risk of leading to uncertainty, misinterpretation and a low level of ambition. In this context, we would like to emphasise that the Inspectorate does not question the purpose or the basic idea of adult education as such, for example that adult education should be characterised by flexibility. At the same time, we see major differences in opportunities and conditions for learners, while the responsibility for control, follow-up and development tends to be overshadowed in the school organisers' governance. Furthermore, contract adult education lacks a review of the owner and management in the same way as in preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools, or the corresponding authorisation/licensing requirement that exists in several other welfare sectors. The combination of weak accountability and great freedom for the school organisers to outsource education, as well as the great freedom for how the education can be provided, has the potential to lead to inequality, poor quality and perspectives that are not compatible with the intentions of the legislators. We believe that a comprehensive review of the regulations governing quality and equivalence in adult education should be considered. This is with a view to achieving an equal and more sustainable education programme of high quality for learners. Great flexibility has an important value, but needs to be balanced with ensuring that the education is of sufficient quality.

Consider investigating whether there is information about individual operators in municipalities that the Swedish Schools Inspectorate needs in order to strengthen its inspections and reviews

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate recognises that municipalities may have information that could strengthen the Inspectorate's risk assessment, inspection and review. We would therefore like to draw attention to the possibility of investigating the issue of a possible data obligation for municipalities. Similar obligations exist in the health and social care sector,

among others. In our inspection and review, different information is used when selecting inspection subjects. We note that the overwhelming majority of the information on misconduct that the Inspectorate receives each year comes from the pupils' guardians. It is unusual for information that could lead to an intervention to be received from the municipalities, despite the extensive activities they carry out. As a school organiser, the municipality often has strong local knowledge and a significant responsibility to prevent unscrupulous operators from carrying out activities that the municipality conducts itself or through a contractor. However, the information that the municipality has and that could contribute to the work of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate rarely reaches the Inspectorate.

Consider the need for stronger regulation of international schools

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate would like to highlight the risks we see surrounding international schools and the limited regulation to which these schools are subject. The limited regulation means, for example, that international schools are not covered by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate's ownership and management review. This means that the Inspectorate is not able to check out the people behind these activities, despite the fact that they are financed with public funds. We believe that this poses particular risks in a system in which individual operators receive public funds and fees, while the Swedish Schools Inspectorate's opportunities to intervene against unsuitable operators are limited.