



# Special Education and Policy Change: A Study of Six Jurisdictions The case of Sweden

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## The case of Sweden – a brief background

- Percentage of GDP spent on compulsory school: 7,3%
- Ethnic composition: 15% of the population is born in another country than Sweden (SCB 2012)
- Unemployment rate: 7,6 % (Dec 2012)
- Sweden has about 9,5 million habitants
- About 1,5 million children go to school
- Pre-school 1-5 years old
- Pre-school class: 6 years old
- Comprehensive school: 7-16 years old (compulsory)
- Upper Secondary school : 16-19 years old



## The case of Sweden – the school

- 90% in compulsory school and 75 % in upper secondary school
- 12 % in free schools in primary and secondary school
- 25-50% of the pupils in upper secondary school to free school
- Schools for Sami
- Schools for intellectually impaired children (learning disability)
- Special schools for deaf and hearing impairments
- Special teaching groups, mainly for children "having" ADHD or Aspergers
- Upper secondary completion rate: 82%
- High school completion rate: 42% of 25-34 year-olds
- Early school leavers: 6,7%
- Special schools for deaf and hearing impairment: 516 pupils
- PISA ranking 22th, 2009
- New Education Act, 2010:800 from the 1st of July 2011.



## SEN - identification and classification

- Children identified through processes in Pupil Health Team and in IEP (Individual Educational Plans), Action Provision Plan
  - Classifications official:
    - Intellectually impaired (Learning disability)
    - Deaf
    - Hearing impairment
    - Visual impairment
    - children in need of special support
  - Other classifications used in practice, for example:
    - ADHD
    - ASD, Aspergers
    - dyslexia
    - low intelligence
- etcetera



## Interviews of key-informants at different levels

- Government
- National agency for special education
- National Agency for school inspection
- Head of all schools in a city
- 2 Head teachers
  
- Decentralised schoolsystem.



## Policy discourse and direction of travel

- Inclusion and the right to receive support for learning
- Possibility to appeal against decisions concerning special needs support
- Focus on results and raising standards - every child should reach the same goals of knowledge
  
- Towards – more of clear and distinct teacher-led lessons, less own work - politician
- Formative assessments, less of teaching methods - school inspectors claim.
- More of special education - a head teacher claims,
  
- Pupils in special schools decreasing



## Policy formation and the policy process

- Interest groups for disabled people have a huge impact on the policy formation
- Head teachers also think media is influential and the national agency for school inspection
- EU and OECD have little influence on the development of SEN-system.



## Categorisation system

No categorisation system is used.

- Schools for Intellectually impaired children (learning disabilities)
- Special schools for Deaf and hearing impairment

However, several other categories are used, for example

- ADHD, ADD
- ASD, Aspergers
- dyslexia
- Speech – and language impairment





## Official statistics

- No official statistics

However, in the new Education Act the Action Provision Plan becomes central.

The head teacher of responsible. The child's need should be investigated "speedily" and a decision is made by the head teacher. Establish an Action Provision Plan.

All decisions and APP are registred.



## Intersectionality and disproportionality

- The outspoken purpose is to offer an equal school for all
- One assignment of the school is to compensate for low SES.
- In the bigger cities about 25% of the budget is allocated to deprived areas.



## International comparisons of academic achievement

- PISA and to raise standards: "that's what our politics is about"
- Measures taken:
  - 1) Improve teachers competence
  - 2) New Education Act and curriculum
  - 3) Grades in early years
- On the local schools PISA is not that influential at all.



## Marketisation and choice

- Free schoolchoice for everyone. Taken for granted nowadays. Choose another regular school or a free- school.
- Municipalities have to inform about what choices are available
- Deprived areas - the parents tend to choose a regular or free school in another area. Especially parents with an immigrant background do this
- Free schools profiled towards children in need of special support



## Curriculum change and development

- New Education Act 1st of July 2011. And a new curriculum.
- Children in need of special support should as far as possible be **included in regular class.**
- **Every child should reach the goals of learning.** According to one head teacher this is not impossible and as a response there needs to be more special educational competence



## Funding regimes

- The head teacher is responsible of examining the need of special support and make the final decision
- The pupil health team with experts from different fields will support the head teacher in the examination
- The parents could appeal against the decision
- The municipalities distribute the funding to schools and to extra support
- Certain amount of the budget directed towards schools in deprived areas
- Special schools – 500 pupils cost 930.000 Skr for each pupil
- Schools for Learning Disability - 12.100 pupils costs 393.000 Skr
- Compulsory school - 886.000 pupils costs 85.000 Skr



## Horizon scanning

- Knowledge about successful teaching methods will increase
- Increase teachers competence
- Higher demands on the individual child might result in that more pupils will fail in school
- Extended special needs education
- My question is if assessments and measuring children and raising standards (everyone reach the same goals) will result in a more unequal school and an increasing special needs education with exclusion as a result?