COMBATTING DISPARITIES IN ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL, ITALY AND SPAIN

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Study of best practice on inclusive education in other European countries

Nordic learning examples from Finland, Norway and Sweden

CONTENTS

I.   INTRODUCTION

Purpose and theoretical approach

The purpose of this report is to give an understanding of the Nordic education systems, their structure, the development work that has taken place in inclusive education. The purpose of this report is also to provide experiences and a *general understanding of the challenges* in the Nordic countries *and the strategies to meet them*. The base is a collaboration between Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland and Denmark which started with the Raising the Achievement project by the Agency in 2015. From this base we, the country policy experts, in this report will focus on the development of the education systems in Finland, Norway and Sweden, exploring mainly commonalities, such as being rather decentralised systems, but also differences such as the pace of reforms.

The second purpose is, based on the priorities and themes of Italy, Portugal and Spain, to present relevant learning examples of ways to develop more inclusive schools in Finland, Norway and Sweden, and by this initiate a dialogue concerning transferability of experiences from one context to another.

As a theoretical base we have used the following model of Theory of Change, developed concerning policy reforms and their effectiveness in local context, mainly in order to 'keep order' of our own assumptions, interpretations and reflections.

Model of theory of change (Skoglund, 1993; Skoglund & Erkinger, 2007)
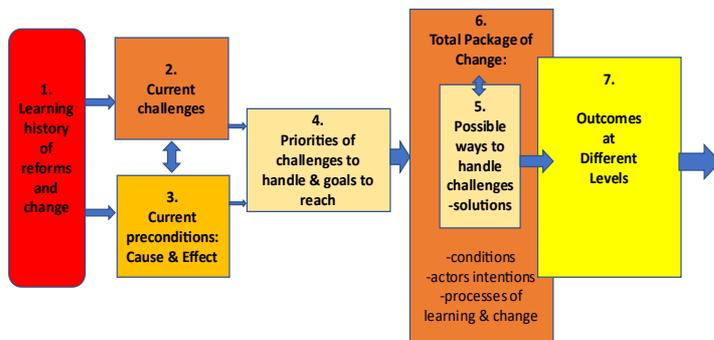
Figure 1 Model of theory of change

In order to provide fruitful experiences by learning cases and by system development at large, it is of great importance to understand the 'learning history of reforms and change' in the country in focus as a background to the current challenges, preconditions and

priorities. One can by relating experiences, i.e., Sweden's, to challenges like those in the three project countries, and provide information on possible ways to handle current challenges. At the same time these possibilities need to be connected to 'a total package of change'; the current surrounding conditions, intentions and processes of learning and change in a specific system.

Focus and priorities by the three Southern countries

We, the three country experts, have together tried to make an initial overview of the challenges and priorities of the three countries, so far. We do interpret that there are a lot

Italy

1. Strengthen the governance and financing of inclusive education.

2. Strengthen school autonomy

3. The improvement of teacher's competences for inclusive education

4. The role of autonomy and communication assistants and non-teaching staff in promoting inclusive practice.

5. Addressing regional inequalities in relation to inclusive practice **at** school and service delivery level

Portugal

1. Strengthening the governance & financing of inclusive education

2. Developing capacity for diversity, equity and inclusion in education

3. Promoting school level responses to student diversity

Spain

1. Organizing and guaranteeing equitable attention to vulnerable students

2. Participation of all those involved in the educational response to vulnerable students

3. Developing networks and collaboration mechanisms between educational centres at all levels.

4. Collaboration with families / community settings.

5. Teacher training for **inclusion.**

Common time logic of different challenges?

Steering mechanism	**General aim**	**Improvement targets**	**Output focus**	**Outcomes**
→Governance & financing-- →	Develop capacity for diversity, equity & inclusion -→	*Improve teacher & support teacher training *Promote school level responses *Improve role of support functions *Develop multi-level & networking approach to collaboration *Increase family involvement	-->Increased inclusive capability in classrooms----------→	Increased: -belonging -well-being -learning -→ -achievement -life competence

Figure 2. Focus and priorities by the three countries

of commonalities between the countries, and also differences, i.e., degree of centralised–decentralised system.

This is, of course, an oversimplification of what it is all about, but a beginning. We did try to put the three countries' priorities in a time logical frame of reference, in order to later make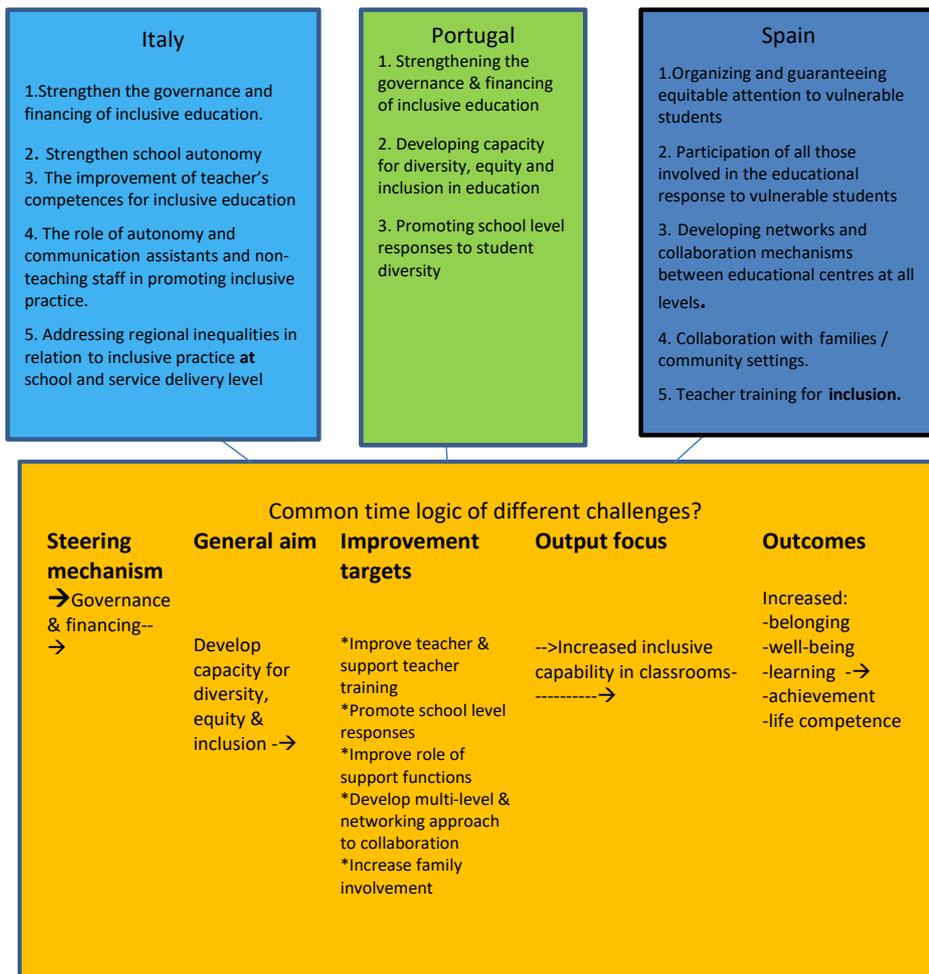 comparison between systems. As we interpret it, all three countries do have the same underlying general aim in the project, that is to develop greater capacity for handling diversity, creating more equity and inclusion. The countries do however differ concerning which improvement targets to focus. This can be fruitful in the common project, learning about functioning on each target factor for all the countries.

From this overview, we did choose to start with a general recapitulation of some main results from research: what do we really know about inclusion? Then we continue with specific descriptions of each Nordic country's main system features, in order to strengthen the understanding of the contexts. Then we elaborate a chapter concerning commonalities in current challenges and system strategic changes and improvements. One base for this is a project (2015-2021) between the Nordic countries, where the purpose was to better understand the challenges in the Nordic systems in terms of *what is in the black box of education?* By doing so, we realised that it is not one box or factor, which can reveal the secrets, it is rather a matter of seeing the needs in the everyday life of the education core process, namely professional teaching and pupil learning in the light of parent's expectations, policy expectations and the genuine capability to understand the *uncertainties* and the *enabling factors* in and between several boxes.

The experiences and learning examples from the Nordic countries will then be presented under the heading of five themes (trying to match the priorities by Italy, Portugal and Spain):

1. Development of governance and financing
2. Improvement of teacher education and training
3. Organising and utilisation of specialist and support functions
4. Improvement of inclusive capability at school level and in classrooms
5. Improvement of family involvement

All themes are of course interconnected, but we try to keep them apart to make the description clearer. Concerning theme 4 however our judgement is that concerning school level and classrooms there is more of importance to handle them together since classrooms never are in a vacuum.

Thereafter, we do present our reflections on transferability of the learning examples in terms of important conditions necessary to support the improvement according to learning examples. The model in figure 1 helps us to orientate in the question of transferability.

Finally, we make some fundamental conclusions when it comes to develop and improve large systems.

What do we really know about inclusion through research?

Here is a selection of research, relevant regarding the themes above; it concerns factors and mechanisms that hinder or contribute to inclusive capability of the education system. The following obstacles are often highlighted:

- *Inclusion processes are characterised by complex requirements and uncertainty:* Baglieri et al., 2010; Muijs et al., 2011; Persson, 2001, 2007.

- *Teachers feel that they lack experience and knowledge:* Allan, 2008; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011; Pijl and Frissen, 2009; Skolverket, 2011; Ware et al., 2011.

- *School problems are highly individualised by heads of administration, principals and teachers:* Gerrbo, 2012; Giota and Emanuelsson, 2011; Göransson et al., 2012; Haug, 2012; Skolverket, 2008; Tetler, 2012.

- *Lack of conceptual clarity and methodological weaknesses complicates research communication:* Haug, 2012; Hicks-Monroe, 2011; Nilholm and Göransson, 2013; Persson and Persson, 2011.

International and Nordic research identifies a number of crucial factors promoting inclusion which, together with systematic reviews on *excellent teaching* and *excellent school development,* provide a starting point for understanding promotive factors:

- *Functional management team*, with distribution of leadership and school-to-school collaboration (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010; Burnett, 2005; Jarl, Blossing and Andersson, 2017), and by that *clear school leader and teacher commitment* combined with *effective competence development*, planning of time and support in the classrooms (Gerrbo, 2012; Ware et al., 2011).

- *Collegial learning* between teachers and researchers as critical friends (Carrington and Robinson, 2006; Langelotz, 2017), focused on *crucial questions in practice* (Waldron and McLeskey, 2010), the *local context* and its learning history (Skoglund and Erkinger, 2007) and on the necessity of *systematic process support* in order to come to deeper action learning (Andersson et al., 2020).

- *Excellent teaching* is crucial in explaining pupil achievement (Håkansson and Sundberg, 2012; Hicks-Monroe, 2011) with characteristics such as: confidence in and understanding of students' ability to learn, well-organised, planned, reflective teaching based on solid subject knowledge, effective treatment of the knowledge in relation to the students through varied, challenging and inspiring approaches that encourage the students to become independent subjects, well-structured qualitative goals and challenging projects, just beyond the students' current horizon.

- *Consideration and analysis of students' experiences* in terms of community, participation and results (Ainscow and West, 2006; Nilholm and Göransson, 2013; Vianello and Lanfranchi, 2009) and a *mobilisation of actors outside* the school (Carrington and Robinson, 2006).

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Sundberg and Håkansson point out that it is not about traditions, the autonomy, the resources or the type of development strategies. '*Rather, the key to all changes is to begin to redefine current ways to think about school development – to construct a new map of the current conditions…It is about building a sustainable theory of change which is able to mark possible roads to walk on…this is a harsh message.*' (Sundberg and Håkansson, 2016, p. 251).

Inclusion can also be explained in terms of three different dimensions, each of which describes important aspects of inclusion. (The following is from Nilsen, 2017)

The physical/organisational is about how the training is organised. Having physical and organisational access to fellowship with others is an important aspect of inclusion, and of great importance for the individual's opportunity to participate in the learning community.

The social dimension of inclusion is about whether the social environment is inclusive in such a way that everyone has a real opportunity to be part of the social community, and to develop social relationships with their peers.

The academic/cultural dimension of inclusion is about whether everyone is given access to professional learning and development in ways that make sense to the individual. Cultural participation means participating in learning activities and learning communities together with others, such as group assignments, station teaching or project work.

The concept of inclusion can also be divided into an objective and a subjective side. If we start from physical/organisational, social and professional/cultural inclusion, all these three dimensions have both an objective and a subjective side.

This is illustrated in the chart:

Objective Perception of inclusion ← Physical/Organisational Social Academic/cultural → **Subjective** Experience of inclusion

Figure 3. Dimensions in the concept of inclusion

Based on this model, inclusion will be about:

- How the learning environment is adapted for physical/organisational inclusion, social inclusion and academic/cultural inclusion.

- The child's and pupil's experience of the learning environment with regard to physical/organisational, social and academic/cultural inclusion.

A complex phenomenon, as inclusive school development, is however hard to capture only by systematic reviews and surveys concluding by lists of facilitating factors. Therefore, we turn to a description of the context and education system of each Nordic country.

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II.   THE CONTEXT AND EDUCATION SYSTEM OF EACH NORDIC COUNTRY

The Finnish education system

Finland has a population of about 5.5 million people. Education is one of the cornerstones of the Finnish welfare society. Finland's educational system offers equal educational opportunities for all. According to the National Core Curriculum each pupil and student has the right to grow into his or her full potential as a human being and a member of society. To achieve this, they need encouragement and individual support as well as experiences of being heard and valued in the school community. They also need to feel that the community cares about their learning and well-being. Equally important are experiences of participation and opportunities for working together with others to advance the functioning and welfare of the community. Education all the way from pre-primary to higher education is free of charge. Finnish teachers are highly educated and strongly committed to their work.

The prerequisites for implementing these principles include taking local needs and possibilities into consideration, co-operation with the guardians and other partners, and genuine involvement of the pupils in developing the community. The school operates as a learning community and encourages all its members to learn. A learning community develops in dialogue. The community is strengthened by working together and through participation. Reflecting on the goals, regular evaluation of one's own work promotes the learning of a community. It is supported by feedback from homes and other partners. Learning is also promoted by drawing on information received through development efforts, evaluations and research (Opetushallitus, 2014)

Local municipalities, supported by the state subsidy, are responsible for the organisation of basic education. The Finnish basic school contains grade levels one to nine, educating children ages 7–15 years old. The first six grade levels are mainly taught by classroom teachers, who have master's degrees in education. Grades 7–9 are taught by subject teachers with master's degrees. Their degree includes one year of pedagogical studies. There is a separate master's degree programme for special education teachers. The first two groups are only shortly introduced to this field. The need for more knowledge to meet individual differences is regularly stressed.

- early childhood education and care which is provided for children before the compulsory education begins, (at the age of seven normally)

- pre-primary education which is provided for children in the year preceding the beginning of compulsory education,

- nine-year of primary and lower secondary education (comprehensive school), which is compulsory

- upper secondary education, which is either general upper secondary education or vocational education and training, and

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- [higher education](#) provided by universities and universities of applied sciences.
- Furthermore, [adult education](#) is available at all levels.

[Bigger picture of the Finnish education system File opens in a new tab PDF 62kB](#) .

Vipunen- Education statistics Finland: [Pre-primary and basic education (vipunen.fi)](#). The statistics are based on data and registers collected by Statistics Finland and on KOSKI, a National Registry and Data Transfer Service for Study Rights and Completed Studies, maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education. Data collected by Statistics Finland is available from 2000 onwards, and data based on the KOSKI database is mainly available from 2020 onwards.

Decentralised administration

During the last fifty years Finland has shifted from centralised to decentralised system and then a little bit back again towards more central guidance and support. In 1994 the renewed National Core Curriculum gave only very broad national guidelines. Every local authority and school were expected to draw up their own specific curriculum on the basis on it. The idea was that local needs could be better taken into consideration, and that special features of a school and its surroundings could be made use of in teaching and learning. This curriculum was created both nationally and in the local level in new way. Working became more interactive and co-operative. Head teachers and teachers were inspired; they had influence on the whole education system.

At the same time the system of inspecting schools and textbooks by the National Agency for Education was abolished. It was not only to strengthen the autonomy of local authorities but also the autonomy of teachers in choosing their working methods and materials grew remarkably (Järvinen, R. 2008).

The latest guidelines for the National Core Curriculum for basic education were issued in 2014. The basic goal of the latest Core Curriculum has been to create better and more solid ground to local authorities and schools responsible for organising education in practise. This is the way to take better care of equal opportunities and at the same time of high-quality education in the whole country.

Finland does not have any national tests during basic education. The culture of trust is important. The trust that people do their job well and that for this they need more support than control. The Finnish vision on steering on quality of education is introduced in the next chapter.

The emphasis on local autonomy does not mean Finland is encouraging a competition between schools. On the contrary, there is a concern over a trend which is emerging in large cities in particular, with parents starting to pick schools for their children. During the current government term, programmes and funding models have been developed to reduce regional and school disparities. An example of this is the positive discrimination model presented in chapter x.

How to ensure that inclusive education is done in an equitable way

A major objective of Finnish education policy, in addition to equity, is to achieve as high a level of education and competence as possible for the whole population. Another key

principle is that **the education system is based on trust and responsibility. The provision of education is steered through regulations, information and funding from the central level.**

Without appropriate central government support and regulatory measures, decentralisation can cause more harm than good in the education system reform and the importance of clear policy and implementation plans has been highlighted.

The Finnish vision on steering on quality of education:

Strong belief in self-regulation and autonomy at local and school level, but with support and guidance from the national level. Important steering instruments:

- Legislation: Basic Education Act and Decree
- Decree defining the general national objectives and distribution of lesson hours in basic education
- Government programmes and strategies of the Ministry of Education and Culture
- National Core Curriculum, local curriculum and school curriculum based on the National Core Curriculum
- Financial resources: core funding, incentives, subsidies
- Information and communication, guidance through information
- Development work based on research and statistics
- Initial teacher education and in-service training
- Trust and responsibility as gesture, creating quality instead of controlling
- Structuring and organising of relations and interactions between different stakeholders within the educational field

The development work of inclusive education and the support for learning and school attendance has taken place over the last 15 years. During this time, Finland has had three different strategy working groups, have implemented a reform of three-tier support, made progress on inclusion, piloted new structures and pedagogical approaches, conducted extensive research and developed multidisciplinary co-operation.

The development work has typically built on previous work and initiatives. Social and political agreement on the value of education has provided stability on the structure and key features of the education system. The development work is carried out together with different actors, such as teachers, school leaders, teacher trainers, researchers and education providers, in an open, interactive and co-operative process. This ongoing dialogue works out like a learning cycle, it helps to identify the issues to be improved, to find solutions that best serve teaching and learning, to promote the commitment of all stakeholders in the development process and to define the goals of education. International co-operation and development projects have also had an impact from strategy work to all development activities, in particular the work and contacts of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and the OECD evaluations.

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The Norwegian education system

Kindergartens in Norway are pedagogical institutions providing early childhood education and care for children aged 0-5 years. Public grants to kindergartens are financed over the municipalities' unrestricted income (framework funding and tax revenues). It is up to the individual municipality to decide how much funding will be allocated to kindergartens via the municipal budget. The municipalities provide grants to approved, non-municipal kindergartens (privately owned, county-owned and state-owned) and all kindergartens are to be treated equally when distributing funding. Max monthly price in 2023 is NOK 3000, approx. 300 euro. Low-income families may be offered reduced fees.

Compulsory schooling is ten years and children start school at the age of six. Primary and lower secondary education is founded on the principle of a unified school system that provides equal and adapted education for all on the basis of a single national curriculum. From 1 January 1999, all municipalities in Norway have been legally obliged to provide day-care facilities before and after school hours for children attending the first four grades.

The municipalities are responsible for running primary and lower secondary schools, while county authorities have responsibility for upper secondary schools. Within the framework of statutes and national curricula, municipalities, schools and teachers are able to decide what learning materials to use and what teaching methods to adopt. Each school has a head teacher as well as various boards and committees.

Adults are also entitled to primary and lower secondary education. Everyone who completes primary and lower secondary education is entitled to upper secondary education qualifying for further studies or a vocation.

The Norwegian Block Grant System

The general grant scheme is a system both for allocating general grants to local governments and to equalise differences in income and expenditure needs between them:

- Partial equalisation of local taxes
- Equalisation of expenditure needs
- Distribution of rural and urban grants.

The objectives are to ensure high-quality public services, an equal standard of public services, fiscal control for the state government and to enable and strengthen local democracy.

Equalisation of expenditure needs is important because we have great disparities in demography, geography, and socio-economic variables. Full compensation for involuntary differences in expenditure needs. Expenditure needs are calculated through a cost matrix and measured through an index of expenditure needs. The indexes are used to redistribute between municipalities and between counties.

The following overarching objectives are particularly relevant for the financing of primary and secondary education and training:

The knowledge sector offers higher-quality services.

Common educational environment promotes inclusion, motivation, and mastery.

More co-ordinated and earlier intervention for all children and young people.

Employees in the knowledge sector have more relevant expertise.

Training and education that provides more relevant qualifications.

Skills development and lifelong learning are more accessible to everyone across the country.

Inclusive education system

Influenced by the Salamanca statement (UNESCO, 1994), the notion of inclusive education entered Norwegian policy documents from the mid-1990s, but the spirit of inclusion dates far back. Along with the other Scandinavian countries, Norway has a history of universal schooling. In the first half of the 18th century free schools for children of 'common men' were introduced, preceded by the claim of the Church that everyone should be able to read religious texts in order to be confirmed in church. A system with a free public school 'for all' and private schools for those who could afford it, continued throughout the 19th century. For learners with a disability, mostly private solutions existed, but from 1881 a law was passed about schools for 'the abnormal', i.e. the blind, the deaf and the mildly intellectually disabled. In the last two decades, state authorities have encouraged national reform programmes to create innovation and change across policy realms and levels. They have also enacted changes by reorganising their own administrative apparatus at the national level. (Kari Nes, Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Practices, An International Perspective, 2017)
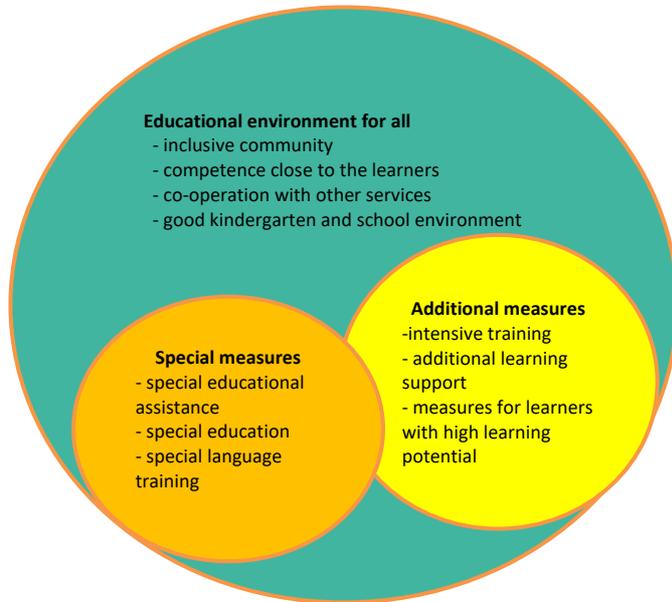
Today, the most common definition of inclusive education in Norway is multiple-oriented, meaning that inclusive education is a product of a variety of values, processes and experiences. Learning environment is a particularly central element in inclusive education.

Inclusion is the basic principle and goal in Norway. It targets private and public kindergartens, public schools and private schools with state-funded support, as well as higher education institutions. The administration of the education system is divided into three levels (central level, county level, municipal level) with different responsibilities.

The goal is an education system of high quality, and that each learner is met with high expectations, which can be adapted to the circumstances and abilities of each. In kindergartens, children with disabilities shall be entitled to priority for admission. They are also entitled to special needs assistance according to an official decision. All children have the right to education; from the year they turn six. A child that either does not, or is unable to, benefit satisfactorily from ordinary teaching has the right to special education.

In schools, education shall be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual pupil, apprentice, and training candidate. All tuition must be adapted. Special needs education is to be provided within the pupil's ordinary class insofar as it is possible and sufficient. The right to special needs education is linked to the pupils' benefit from education – not to diagnosis.

In white paper Meld. St. 6 (2019-2020) it is illustrated like this:

Educational environment for all
- inclusive community
- competence close to the learners
- co-operation with other services
- good kindergarten and school environment

Additional measures
-intensive training
- additional learning support
- measures for learners with high learning potential

Special measures
- special educational assistance
- special education
- special language training

Figure 4. Meld. St. 6

The Norwegian Education Act states that all children in Norway have a right to attend their neighbourhood school or the school designated for the catchment area where they live.

The pupil or the parents of the pupil may require the school to carry out the necessary investigations to establish whether the pupil needs special education, and, if so, what form of education the pupil needs.

The decision as to whether a child's development requires special consideration or support rests upon a concrete assessment in each individual case. In line with chapter 5 of the Education Act, the decision shall be made based on educational and psychological counselling and consultation with the student and their parents.

An Individual Subject Curriculum (IOP in Norwegian) includes learning goals and content of the special education and is an aid and tool for teachers. Is to be revised once a year.

The pupils may be divided into groups as necessary. The groups must not be larger than is justifiable in relation to pedagogy and safeguarding. The organisation shall safeguard the pupils' need for social belonging. Pupils shall normally not be organised according to level of ability, gender, or ethnic affiliation.

If complex needs, pupils, and families may need co-ordinated and interdisciplinary services. According to the Education Act, then the school shall participate in a

multidisciplinary responsibility group that co-ordinates the work around the individual child and their families.

For further details, please see annex where all relevant paragraphs are written. In the annex also some recent proposals of new legislation included, announced 24 March 2023.

Existing reviews on empirical research indicate that organisational differentiation by academic level has a negative or small positive effect on learners with low and medium achievements (Leuven og Rønning 2011, Bailey m.fl. 2008, Wentzel og Wigfield 2009, Hattie 2009, Slavin 1990). If teachers manage to establish a good learning environment, high-achieving students can achieve equally good results in heterogeneous groups as in their own level-based groups.

Another problem the empirical research has documented is the risk of misplacement of students in the different groups. Some studies suggest that students from different backgrounds are placed in different performance groups even when their performance is equal. The consequence of increased use of organisational-level differentiation may thus be increased social differences in schools. Differentiated instruction and schools adapting their teaching so that all pupils have the best possible learning outcome from the ordinary teaching is therefore important. Schools adapt the teaching by using various work methods and pedagogical approaches, by using various teaching aids, by the way they organise the teaching and by working with the learning environment, subject curricula, and assessment.

Differentiated instruction applies to all pupils and shall for the most part take place through variation and adaptation to the diversity in the pupil group within the learning community. Pupils who need differentiated instruction beyond the ordinary teaching programme are entitled to special needs education.

In education, pupils are to be divided into classes or groups that will meet their needs for social affiliation. For parts of the training, pupils can be divided into other groups as needed. Pupils shall not normally be organised according to level of ability, gender or ethnic affiliation. Pupils may not be organised according to academic level unless it is necessary for the pupils, individually and collectively, to benefit properly from the instruction (the minimum standard set out in the Act). What is to be regarded as a justifiable outcome of the instruction must be related to the objectives of the instruction and what is realistic for the individual student compared to other students.

In 2018, the Parliament adopted amendments to the Education Act and the Independent Schools Act. The schools must ensure that students in grades 1 to 4 that are at risk of falling behind in reading, writing or numeracy will be offered intensive training. The training can be given as sole instruction for a short period of time. This presupposes that consideration for the student's best interests is highly considered. Mostly this is carried out by extra teacher in the classroom and/or dividing the pupils in smaller training groups. There is a variety of didactic material for the teachers to use.

Grade retention is not practised. Young people who have completed primary and lower secondary education, or the equivalent, are entitled to three years (four years if attending vocational education) of upper secondary education or training. They don't have to pass certain exams to have this right, and adapted education is the basic principle. There is no age limit for entering upper secondary education, but normal starting age is 16.

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All pupils have the right to upper secondary education and training regardless of marks/no marks from lower secondary.

When needed, the children should receive support without delay. This presupposes good co-operation with other services and that the competence is close to the children and pupils in an inclusive community.

Minority language students and immigrants

If you have a mother tongue other than Norwegian or Sami, you are entitled to special language instruction until you have sufficient proficiency in Norwegian to follow the regular instruction in school. According to the Education Act section 2-8, a pupil attending the primary and lower secondary education and who has a mother tongue other than Norwegian or Sami, has 57 the right to adapted education in Norwegian until they are sufficiently proficient in Norwegian to attend the regular instruction offered. If necessary, such pupils are also entitled to mother tongue instruction, bilingual subject teaching, or both. In 2018- 2019, 39 per cent of the pupils in primary and lower secondary schools, who were immigrants or born in Norway with immigrant parents, received adapted education in Norwegian.

If you have language challenges, you may be entitled to spend more than three years on the training. The maximum is two years' additional upper secondary education and training if this is necessary for reaching the individual educational objectives. Minority language learners may be entitled to special language instruction. Before the county authority makes the decision to provide such additional education, an assessment shall be made of the needs of the pupil and the school must map the Norwegian language skills. Mapping must also be carried out during the training so that it can be clarified when you can switch to the regular training.

To apply for admission to upper secondary education, the applicant must have legal residence in the country. The applicant must also have a diploma from a Norwegian primary and lower secondary school, or document equivalent primary and secondary education. Minority language speakers can also receive training at an upper secondary school in a combination programme before starting regular upper secondary education.

Combination classes is a training programme for young people with only a short period of residence in Norway. Here, newly arrived students are offered adapted primary and lower secondary education at an upper secondary school together with peers of age.

The offer applies to minority language youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are entitled to upper secondary education pursuant to section 3-1 of the Education Act, but who, due to a short period of residence in Norway, need more primary and lower secondary education to be able to pass through upper secondary education. The group is complex. Some have attended Norwegian primary school for a short period, and others have primary school from their home country. In addition to more primary and lower secondary education, a large proportion need to develop sufficient Norwegian language skills to follow the instruction at upper secondary level. In many places, newly arrived young people without the right to upper secondary education, but with the right to primary education for adults, are also allowed to attend these classes.

The programme will normally include fewer subjects and provide greater freedom to concentrate the training on what the individual may need of subjects and curriculum from primary and lower secondary school. Mostly the offer applies to the subjects Norwegian, mathematics, English, physical education, and social studies. Some students also have science and/or vocational specialisation or language practice in a company. The training will be 1–2 years in an age-appropriate upper secondary school environment giving necessary primary/lower secondary competences in order to prepare for upper secondary education. The schools try to make good learning environments and strengthen inclusive practices, i.e. projects where the combination class collaborates with students in ordinary upper secondary school classes.

Challenges

There are always tensions and challenges in how to balance the responsibilities and influence of the state, municipalities and professions. In connection with the 2020 renewal of curricula (called Subject renewal), there are ongoing research also to look into the processes of change in the span between state level, school owner level, school level, professional profession collaboration and teaching practice.

The Swedish education system

Ideas, structures, challenges and development 2005–2023

The Swedish education system from pre-school to adult education (basic and upper secondary level), involves approximately 2.5 million people attending school every day. If all professionals are counted, we come close to 3 million citizens involved (Persson, 2019, p. 17; Skolverket, 2018). A complex system of public and independent schools, regulated and governed on one side by national government, and on the other side governed and financed in large part by local political authorities, responsible for the performance of principals and teachers.

One question debated is why there has been a lack of equity and goal achievement in the Swedish system over two decades.

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Sweden a three-level system

*as an umbrella term, here meaning all school forms: preschool, compulsory school, upper secondary and adult education
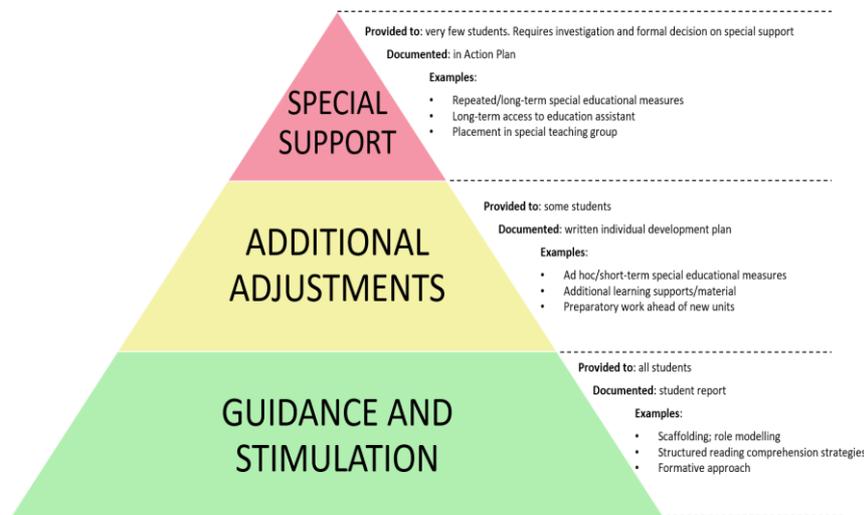
Figure 5. Sweden has a three-level system

In 2010, a new Education Act was passed, which meant large reforms concerning all levels from pre-school to adult education. The Education Act (SFS, 2010) states that the guiding principle from childcare to young adulthood, is access to equivalent education for all. A pupil at risk of not achieving the minimum requirements or meeting difficulties in the school situation do have the right of special support. The underlying idea is that students in need of special support, primarily should be provided the support they need in the regular class setting (SFS, 2010). In 2014, a governmental clarification in law followed with the Education Agency´s advice (Skolverket, 2014) stating the adoption of a three-tiers-model: general support within the classroom, extra accommodation within the classroom, and special support based on an investigation and an action provision plan.

During the period of 2009–2018, the National School Inspectorate indicated a steady pattern. Among those municipalities and schools inspected there have been between 50% to 65% of schools that were found 'having difficulties' to provide extra accommodation, special support and to manage systematic quality assurance focused on improving the learning environment for all pupils, which in part can explain the decline in results in, for example, PISA investigations up until 2017 (Skolinspektionen, 2014; Skolverket, 2015).

A fundamental starting point for discussing learners who may be considered vulnerable to exclusion is that the Swedish Education Act 2010 does not restrict this to any particular group, personal attribute or diagnosis. Based on ideas from 1969, the Act 2010 states that

different circumstances and needs of each individual child must be considered. Educational support measures are prescribed for any child feared not to be able to meet the minimum criteria for assessment of knowledge after the application of national assessment methods (Education Act). In this situation, the following tiers of interventions is initiated. The principle is that there is no legal restriction on who may receive special educational support.

Provided to: very few students. Requires investigation and formal decision on special support

Documented: in Action Plan

Examples:
- Repeated/long-term special educational measures
- Long-term access to education assistant
- Placement in special teaching group

Provided to: some students

Documented: written individual development plan

Examples:
- Ad hoc/short-term special educational measures
- Additional learning supports/material
- Preparatory work ahead of new units

Provided to: all students

Documented: student report

Examples:
- Scaffolding; role modelling
- Structured reading comprehension strategies
- Formative approach

SPECIAL SUPPORT

ADDITIONAL ADJUSTMENTS

GUIDANCE AND STIMULATION

Figure 6. Three tiers of educational support

'The notion of SEN pupils encompasses a broader array of pupils in Sweden than in many other countries, encompassing pupils with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, and pupils encountering difficulties reaching the knowledge goals of the curricula for other reasons.' (Magnusson, 2020, p.29) However, some observers have indicated an increased importance of medical diagnoses for accessing the enhanced 'special support' (Barow and Berhanu, 2021; Isaksson and Lindqvist, 2015). Differences in access to special needs support can partly be traced to how individual municipalities and schools interpret the legislative and policy framework (Magnusson, 2020).

Isaksson and Lindqvist (2015) describe changes in the conception of learners considered vulnerable to exclusion. It has been a change from a categorical perspective based on the individual´s functional disability, towards a more relational perspective focusing on the relation between school environment, professional qualities and the pupil´s preconditions. In parallel with the development of 'a school for all', the profession and degree of 'special educational needs specialist' ('specialpedagog'), broadly equivalent to SENCO, was introduced in the late 1990s. This introduction of a new profession was aligned to the idea of inclusion of as many students as possible in mainstream education, and grounded on a belief that the ´specialpedagog´ could ensure that the school environment and teaching qualities was adapted to different learning styles and abilities.

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The decentralisation and reforms of the 1990s changed the governance from a rule-based to a goal-oriented system, and initiated a change in attitudes towards special education towards helping prevent students from failing to achieve educational knowledge goals. The focus remained on bridging the gap between mainstream and traditional special education practices (Roos, 2021).

The 2004 Carlbeck Committee, which investigated the schools specially designed for pupils with intellectual disability (Särskola), concluded that there were no major differences in education between mainstream schools and the Särskola, and that the target group of Särskola did not gain significantly from being removed from the mainstream schooling environment. It was, therefore, their recommendation to abolish Särskolan altogether (SOU 2004:98). This has not been followed through, although the introduction of new curricula in 2011 brought the Särskola´s curriculum closer to the mainstream curriculum. In the same year, the reform of the Education Act meant that children on the autism spectrum were no longer eligible to be educated in the Särskola, regardless of their ability to cope with daily tasks, unless they also had 'a significant and permanent intellectual disability due to brain damage, caused by external violence or physical illness' (Education Act, 2011). This caused a large dip in the number of children attending adapted schools when it came into force in 2013.

Around 2010 a shift in attitude was indicated, when segregated support measures began to gain greater legitimacy. Special educational needs specialists (Specialpedagog) was complemented by a reinvention of a degree as ´Special teacher´, relied on to identify and address students' needs in order to 'offload' other teachers' responsibility to differentiate teaching for greater inclusion. Several researchers indicated a tension between a policy ideal of inclusion and a focus on children's needs as individual shortcomings. Two studies from 2011 showed that over 90% of principals and local school authorities considered that the need for special support measures was mostly due to individual shortcomings (Giota and Emanuelsson, 2011; Göransson, Nilholm and Karlsson, 2011; Skoglund, 2013).

By 2019, when a new government took power, the public narrative had reached a point where 'inclusion' was seen to have 'gone too far'. Amongst researchers, it is considered that this formulation was the result of a narrow interpretation of inclusion as a placement-dependent concept (Magnusson, 2019; Skoglund and Svanbjörnsdottir, 2020). The new narrative exposed an approach where 'difficult' students should be removed from their normal classroom in order to foster more conducive learning conditions ('studiero') for other students. However, this has also been strongly criticised (Magnusson, 2019).

Statistics and the regulation of access to specialised schools also provides some indication as to thinking around learners vulnerable to exclusion. An illustrating example is that until 1 July 2014 most special pedagogic interventions were referred to as 'special support' and required an investigation and action plan to support their implementation. When the Education Act introduced 'additional adjustments' – a 'hybrid of general and special education' (Barow and Berhanu, 2021, p. 8) – many special measures that had previously been considered as special support that mandated reporting and official follow up no longer 'counted' as such. According to the preparatory work for the amendment in the law '[S]pecial support, in contrast to support in the form of extra adaptations, means interventions of a more extensive nature that are normally not possible for teachers and other school staff to implement within the framework of regular teaching' (Prop

2013/14:160). It further states that 'this does not mean that student support work carried out by someone other than the regular teacher constitutes special support in all situations. Single special educational interventions for a shorter period of time are not counted as special support, but are considered as support in the form of extra adaptations' (ibid.)

The result was a large dip in reported 'special support' (with the criteria of an Action Provision plan) in compulsory school from around 13% each year in the early 2000s to around 5% in 2014 (Barow and Berhanu, 2021). This can indicate that it became simpler for teachers to earlier implement extra adaptions for individual students, rather than through the process of special support by an investigation and an action provision plan. On the other hand, there seems to be a risk of oversimplifying the complexity of creating extra adaptions for teachers. Did the statistical dip correspond to an increase in the quality of extra adaptions to the pupils? During this period, there has been no significant change in the statistics on how many students finish compulsory school without sufficient qualifying grades for entering upper secondary school.

Challenges and development needs: a matter of handling complexity and uncertainty

Inclusion has been pointed as one key element for more sustainable development of societies worldwide in international declarations and conventions (UNESCO, 2001). In the practical context of schools, the tendency, however, in all Scandinavian countries seems to be towards an ambition of 'including all', while there remains a great deal of diagnosis and placement of pupils in special groups (Hansen and Qvortrup, 2013; Nes, 2013; Skoglund, 2013; Ström, 2013). Statements such as 'inclusion benefits all' are frequent, but what does it really mean? '*Inclusion has gone too far*', stated former Minister of Education, Jan Björklund (2018), and a Swedish leading newspaper followed up with: '*The thought was fundamentally good; of course, children, as far as possible, should be in a common class, but the idea of inclusion has gone too far, and it hits hardest on those who have the greatest difficulties.*' (Dagens Nyheter, 2018). How is it possible to state something like that, when approximately 15–25 % of compulsory pupils do not qualify for upper secondary school? There seems to be a lack of a deeper and common understanding of the concept!

The following case illustrates the complexity of inclusion. In 2003, a request for 'help' came to the National agency (SPSM) providing special pedagogic support from a municipality eager to create more 'inclusive schools' (Skoglund and Larsson, 2004). The intention of the management group in the spring was '*we want to include all pupils now*'. A development group was appointed and we, the agency's advisors, firstly asked the management group '*how do you know that everyone wants to include all pupils now?*' The answer was '*well, actually we don't know that, but please evaluate our work so far, concerning those in need of special support*'. When asked if they had any methods to investigate what they needed to know, the group suggested the use of the Focus Group Method involving stakeholders. We advised the development group to investigate the notion of 'professional diversity'. They picked out 16 different actor groups, from politicians to day-care holders, and asked them about their views on inclusion. The results were scattered with 16 rather different ideas and anticipated challenges of inclusion. The management group concluded that they could not have one process of inclusion, as

initially anticipated; rather they realised that they had to meet the needs of 16 different political and professional agendas (Skoglund, 2013)! The investigation clarified the complexity: Teachers felt 'alone' and the staff in support functions (i.e. the special pedagogues) felt 'insufficient'.

Almost all actor groups indicated a lack of clear leadership, whereas the local authorities regarded the special support functions as those who should *drive and implement* an inclusive attitude of mind through a *challenging* work mode. However, teachers did not see themselves as a part of the support system for pupils´ health and learning. The way the special support functions were organised had led to a situation where they were considered as a 'replacement' for teachers rather than a complement to learning. The conclusion in the Agency (SPSM) report was that *'the most formatting and developing factor is a well-functioning 6–8 hours in the classroom, breaks and lunches. If there is low awareness, lack of observing and discoveries in the base of the organisation, the rest of the system, which is more distanced, does not play any significant role.'* (Skoglund and Larsson, 2004, pp. 17–18).

These patterns have repeatedly occurred in many of some 50,000 cases of advisory support from the National special pedagogic support agency (SPSM) between 2003 and 2021. One tendency, during the first decade of the 21ˢᵗ century, can be named as the sequence of '*leaving the hard question over to someone else*', meaning that the question of inclusion is left to special support functions, rather than carried by those responsible in the steering chain (politicians, head of schools, principals and teachers) (Persson, 2001, pp. 92–93; Skoglund, 2013; Skoglund et al., 2020; Västra regionen, 2018).

To meet this challenge, it is not enough to have a law, local plans, support functions or more financial resources. Most Swedish local school systems have built up their *capacity* of competencies, but the key challenge seems to be how to use and connect them. Therefore, there is a great need of constructive local leadership and organised deep learning processes among teachers, supported by skilled support functions. These leadership and learning processes are the core of the work toward higher *inclusive capability* leading to greater pupil achievement (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010; Persson and Persson, 2011; Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016; Skolinspektionen, 2014).

However, the Swedish School Inspectorate's inspection of 2010 shows that of the 15% of all schools that were inspected, 72% of compulsory schools and 65% of upper secondary schools have deficiencies in at least one of three areas that are decisive for pupils' ability to achieve educational goals: systematic quality work, in the special support for students, or in the adaptation of teaching to the student's conditions (Skolinspektionen, 2010, pp. 3–4). In about half of the schools examined, teaching is characterised by a lack of student activity, of room for joint reflections, of adaptation to students' different conditions and needs, and low expectations of students' abilities (Skolinspektionen, 2011). It was indicated that in 62% of the compulsory schools and 55% of the upper secondary schools there was a lack in principals´ responsibility for the schools´ results being analysed. The same pattern was indicated in 2014, especially pinpointing that between half and 2/3 of the inspected schools lacked in extra accommodations to pupils´ needs with in-the-frame of the classroom, as well as providing special support with other functions in the classroom or with special arrangements. Behind this is a lack of systematic quality work,

based on deep analysis, in a dominating part of these schools and school authorities – municipal or independent was indicated (Skolinspektionen, 2014; Skolverket, 2015).

This contradictory situation can partly be explained by too little focus on policy, practice and research on the basic professional learning challenge regarding inclusion. The professionals have been assumed to be able to learn before they are challenged and have received support to learn from the current way to work and its effects. New ideas and methods have been exposed and spread, but without enough base in strong self-analysis by those 'receiving help'. Therefore, many actors rely on the assumptions by which they have long acted (Langelotz, 2017; Liljeroth et al., 2011; Skoglund and Erkinger, 2007).

A summary of Swedish development process 1970–2022

To summarise, the development process of the education system since 1970 in Sweden has been colourful and not linear in rationalistic terms. Rather it can be seen as a reaction of overall tendencies in Swedish society and globally. Sweden and other Nordic countries were in the forefront concerning A school for all, meaning leaving the dual education system by policy and governance creating one unified school form ranging from age 7 up to 18.

As many European countries Sweden had a rather centralised system until 1991, consisting on national government authority (legislation and national agencies). In 1991 there was a decentralisation of authority to the municipalities to lead, finance and organise the schools. There was a huge reform critique mainly from teachers in secondary and upper secondary schools, who feared being 'managed' by local politicians.

In the early 2000s a counter tendency to public school dominance was evolving, mainly from liberals and conservatives. There was a piloting process of *Free-school-trial*, which in 2005 ended in a reform that can be labelled *marketisation*. This opened for more 'free choice' by parents and pupils, and also created a new market that after some fifteen years covers implied that approximately 65 percent join public schools and 35 percent independent schools. However, the fundamental steering mechanism is that both types are financed by municipal tax money.

Sweden then had created a more diversified system of authorities organising schools. This in part can have contributed to a more segregated education system, which became apparent around 2015, when a huge number of immigrants came to Sweden. Due to segregation in housing the patterns of school segregation evolved and underneath that increasing inequity was indicated both by OECD (2015) and two government commissions (SOU 2017:35; SOU 2020:28). This forced the government to find new strategies to increase the equity in the education system.

The policy process since 2006 can be described in the following terms. First a massive reform initiative between 2006 and 2011, and then a step by step muddling through strategy, ending 2019 and onwards in a focus on how to raise equity all the way to a commission suggesting two alternatives to recentralise the system.

The "Science of muddling through": (Lindblom, C. (1959) "the Science of Muddling Through." Public Adminstration review, Vol. 19. No 2 (Spring, 1959)2, pp.79-88)
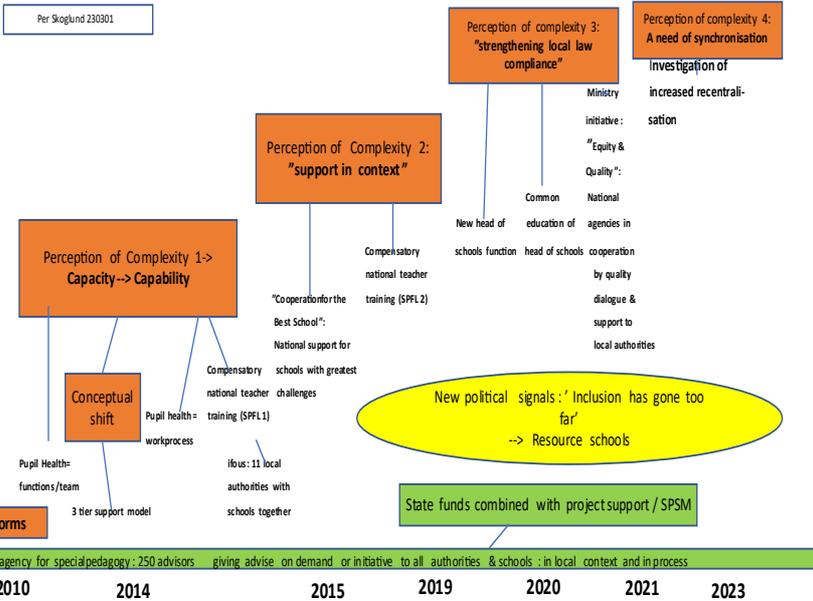
Per Skoglund 230301

Figure 7. Swedish current history of change. Per Skoglund 230301 based on the 'Science of muddling through' (Lindblom, 1959)

The figure is an attempt to understand the policy process by the term 'perception of complexity', which means that when the policy makers have launched more than 20 large reforms, there is seemingly an insight that 'this is not enough'. In sequence some compensatory features are in place to 'cover' the perceived gaps.

In 2015 new political 'counter signals' to inclusive education appears both from liberals and from a stronger rightwing movement. From 2020 this counter tendency has been strengthen by new legislation opening for local authorities (both public and independent) to start more permanent 'resource schools' intended to meet the needs of those that the 'schools cannot handle'. So far, there is however hard to tell in which direction the future will go!

Commonalities in the Nordic countries

The Nordic countries (Finland, Norway and Sweden) do have a lot in common in terms of cultural history, ways to collaborate and also concerning how to handle the question of education. The main features of commonality can be shortly phrased in the following key words:

- Decentralised systems with central steering through regulations, information and support.
- Local autonomy means flexibility in organising education
- Bottom-up-approach: wide participation of different stakeholders in strategic processes
- Strategies are mainly an answer to teachers and multiprofessional challenges: it eases the implementation, because the professionals are more motivated and committed
- Evidence-based approach
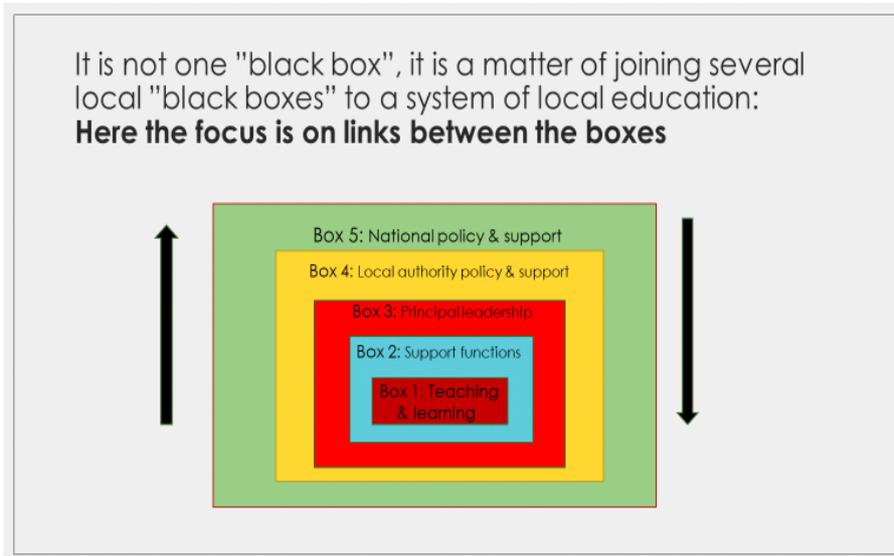- National support for schools and teachers in implementation.

Of course, there are differences in the concrete way- of i.e., financing. All three countries base the financing on tax, but Sweden has gone further concerning financing also independent school authorities and schools by tax.

Nordic network: the challenge – What is in the 'black box' of education?

Since 2015 there has been a formal co-operation between the Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland) on inclusion that can be traced to the project RA4AL (Raising Achievement for All Learners) on behalf of the Agency. Thanks to the Nordplus Horizontal fund, representatives from Sweden, Norway and Iceland continued their collaboration further for two years (Skoglund and Svanbjörnsdottir, 2020). The full material with text and films are found at: Nordic Network: What is inside the black box

The focus in the project was to explore the 'blackbox', the inner core of education, **seeking answers to the 'how question' related to good practices in inclusive education**. We focused on what characterised teachers' approaches in the classroom, leadership and school culture in schools with the goal of understanding how different impact factors (such as teacher/leader education, support system, professional development and leadership) work together in supporting good practices regarding inclusive capability.

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Figure 8. The focus is on links between the boxes

In the first round the participants visited five and in the second four school communities (Akureyri in Iceland, Gothenburg and Gislaved in Sweden and Tromsø in Norway). We observed and interviewed people from different sectors and received presentations about each system.

We reflected upon, zoomed up and wrote a report for each visit that is stored in the homepage we constructed (*ibid*.). We also gathered background information for each country and reports on interconnected fields/levels organised in the five boxes of: teaching and learning, support functions, school leadership, local and national authorities and teacher and principal education. Hopefully, this will meet most of the priorities of challenges by Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Here we will reflect on the main results, similarities and differences between the communities concerning inclusive education, mainly in this project but also connected to the earlier Nordic co-operation projects since 2014 and discuss important factors and strategies for improvement.

The five Nordic countries which were engaged in the project during the first three years have some challenges in common, but differ also concerning more specific national political culture. Here, the focus is on commonalities, and the project framed eight challenges to reflect and handle in the future:

- In all five Nordic countries we see some indications **of a loss or lack of confidence** at several levels: leaders, teachers and pupils. We see somewhat hostile education

systems in all countries and what we miss is the *voices of the young people* and the strengthening of trust and a *collective efficacy* within the whole chain of command in the systems (politicians, ministries, heads of schools, principals, support professionals and teachers).

- **'Inclusion' as a term is not often used at the policy level**. In Norway, the term 'integration' is used again, in Sweden the term 'accessibility' in its widest sense is used. In Iceland, there is a linguistic problem to find a sufficient word that covers the meaning of the concept. One reason that the term inclusion is not used, is that it is 'polluted' and used rhetorically either positively or negatively. The positive–negative debate is primarily constructed from a 'placement view' of inclusion (that inclusion is about having all children in the same school and classroom all the time). In order to get further we propose a systemic perspective in order to contextualise the concept of Inclusion.

- There seems to be a **lack of conditions and processes for professional deep learning in schools**. Our observations and understanding indicates schools as rather hectic, stressed and day-by-day-driven activities and cultures. Also, here there is a lack of a systemic view on the enterprise. Underneath it all, we can, despite concrete differences between the countries, see that schools are not yet commonly organised as professional learning communities.

- We have indicated that in research in all countries there is **mostly 'one-level studies'** and since we are talking about a complex phenomenon, we strongly propose the need for more multi-level studies, for example focusing on the steering chain and the relation between levels of leaders, their discretion and collaboration.

- There seems to be a **lack of leadership perception and understanding of the school in society**. Schools are occupied with the 'within-questions' and rarely take initiative towards the environment in a persistent way. However, there is the connection to parents, but seemingly this relation has become more reactive towards demanding parents. In Sweden especially, we see a lot of pressure on schools due to the right to choose between public and 'free schools'. Schools, therefore, need to be upgraded in capability to proactively and constructively handle parents from a development perspective of the pupils.

- It is also worrying that pupils in general do not progress enough, partly because the system has **not yet developed capability to catch progression.** We need to improve from non-adaptive to adaptive measures of progression.

- We do perceive that all countries now are in **different stages of reforming the system**. Some have done a remarkable number of changes in a short time, as in Sweden. Finland now starts a reform process. Our questions about reforms are: *what are the guiding principles behind reforms? Are the reforms hitting the spot? Do they lead to something?* We see some risks that too many reforms at the same time can reduce the confidence of, foremost, the teachers, but also principals.

- We recognise that **one key to success is the teacher education and the continuing teacher training in service**. Here, we can see a need of a fundamentally new

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thinking concerning how to learn to be a functioning teacher. *What is required of teacher education, the schools, the existing teachers and the union, in order to truly improve teacher capability?*

Through deep case studies in Norway, Iceland and Sweden (and Denmark during the first years of the project), we found some factors and strategies of importance to the performance and the outcome of a local education system. It seems to be about the *transformation* of local systems toward increased inclusive capability and raised achievement, and the capability to create *continuity* over time. It is also about building a strong learning community at all levels, not least it is about *supporting the principals*.

In sum, the capability to integrate 'boxes', rather than creating new loosely coupled ones, seems to be of vital importance. Our conclusion is that **the local school authority´s leadership and support to principals has a positive effect on building trust, understanding and joint work in order to support the staff to gain a greater inclusive capability (to see, hear, understand, lead and stimulate the pupils toward reaching their potential)**.

In all Nordic countries, however, the legislation and policies recommend that the system is 'more proactive'; but when it is within a reactive mode of thinking and acting, this is easier said than done. Therefore, we point out a third way; *the possibility of creating a more constructive theory, and learning in the educational system focusing on 'what works?' (The evidence question) and 'how to value each pupil/person' (the ethical question) at different levels.* This third way moves not just in one direction, but rather combines the *democratic chain of command* (from top to bottom) and *the chain of learning* (from bottom to top). The logic is that the teacher both needs to teach according to curriculum and learn from their pupils when the teaching does not work. The principal both needs to lead by decided norms and rules, and learn from the teachers when it is not working, and so on. In both examples, it is also about respect and appreciation of the 'other', the person you work for or with.

There is need for a cultural shift from the focus on 'object uncertainty' to a focus on 'institutional uncertainty'. By a focus on institutional uncertainty, the deficits and gaps in the educational system are focused, perceived, analysed and handled as one important determinant of school failure or success and low or high achievement of pupils, rather than a one-sided blame on pupils, parents and socio-economic conditions.

III. THEMATIC AREAS AND LEARNING EXAMPLES

Development of governance and financing

Finland – Steering from Central and Regional level

Ministry of Education and Culture

Education policy is defined by Parliament and Government. The Ministry of Education and Culture is the highest authority and is **responsible for all publicly funded education in Finland**. It is responsible for preparing educational legislation and its share of the state budget for the Government.

There are several expert bodies supporting the work of the Ministry, such as the National Forum for Skills Anticipation. National evaluations of learning outcomes are organised by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

Finnish National Agency for Education

The Finnish National Agency for Education is **a national development agency**, which works in close co-operation with the Ministry to develop educational objectives, content and methods for early childhood pre-primary, basic, upper secondary and adult education and training. It is not responsible for higher education.

The Finnish National Agency for Education is **responsible for drawing up and approving the national core curricula** and requirements of qualifications for pre-primary and basic education, general and vocational upper secondary education. In addition to the core curricula, the Agency **monitors and develops educational expenditure, allocated state subsidies and assists the Ministry of Education and Culture in the preparation of education policy decisions.**

Regional level

At regional level there are several bodies, which are responsible for tasks concerning education. There are six Regional State 15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY). and the Regional Agencies AVIs co-operate with the ELY Centres in educational tasks.

Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVIs) are responsible for the regional tasks of the Ministry of Education and Culture. AVIs **also promote the fulfilment of legal protection of pupils and students and assesses regional and equal access to basic services.** The agencies work in close collaboration with local authorities.

Although the Ministry of Education and Culture defines education policy and the Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for its implementation, local authorities have a significant amount of autonomy and responsibility.

As mentioned above, the Finnish system has changed to some extent from decentralised to more centralised, especially with regards to National Core Curricula for ECEC, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education.

There are many strengths in decentralised systems. It Improves quality, because it is closer to local community to 'know and understand' the local needs. It is more democratic with opportunities for participation and collaboration and more efficient in the use of resources arising from more transparent funding and local competition. Smaller units can respond more quickly to emerging needs and challenges and have greater flexibility to innovate. Accountability is strengthened through service users and community involvement. There are more opportunities to increase capacity, strengthen professional motivation and ownership, learning through experience.

Autonomy on the Local level

Local administration is mainly managed by the local authorities. Most commonly these are municipalities or joint municipal authorities which have self-government and the right to impose taxes. The local authorities are responsible for organising early childhood education and care, pre-primary and basic education at a local level. They are mainly responsible for financing these as well.

The task of the local authorities is to offer all children of compulsory school age – including those with mental or physical impairments – an opportunity to learn according to their abilities. The local authorities make decisions on allocation of funding and recruitment of personnel. They can also delegate the decision-making power to the schools.

The education providers, usually municipalities and the schools themselves, draw up their own local curricula within the framework of the national core curriculum. They are also responsible for practical teaching arrangements, the effectiveness, and quality of their education. That is to say, as long as the basic functions determined by law, are carried out, the schools have the right to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements and visions.

One of the key regulations, the national core curriculum, leaves room for local variation and individual schools and teachers have a lot of freedom in designing their own curricula and instruction.

The three key areas for successful decentralisation are:

- ensuring equity,
- building accountability, and
- developing local capacity

across the system at all levels, especially at lower levels.

It is true that decentralised management can lead to unequal development between regions. In Finland, this is reflected in differences between municipalities in provision of support for learning and school attendance. This has been recognised and various measures have been developed to minimise these differences.

It is important that any model of decentralisation is relevant to both the country and local area contexts, keeping in mind that 'even the best policies travel badly' (Harris, 2012). It is evident that countries should **have a clear structure for authority, responsibility and lines of accountability, which can be owned by the local authorities who will make decisions.**

Subsidiarity is one of the important principles that governs decentralisation: planning and management decisions should be taken by the organisation that is best placed to implement functions or tasks and be accountable for them. UNESCO (2014) suggest **that some functions related to curriculum, assessment and quality assurance are best kept centralised.**

Barber and Mourshed (2007) write that '*You can mandate to get the system from awful to adequate but not from adequate to great. To do that you have to unleash potential and creativity. This cannot be centrally mandated but has to be locally enabled*.'

Evaluation information and support for developing education

In Finland quality assurance is primarily the responsibility of education providers and the educational institutions themselves at all levels of education.

The education providers have a statutory duty to evaluate the education they provide and its effectiveness and participate in external evaluations of their activities. This duty is stipulated in the respective acts for each school form from ECEC to higher education. Self-evaluation practices are decided locally.

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is responsible for evaluating early childhood education and care, education and training nationally. FINEEC's evaluations cover the entire education system from early childhood education and care to higher education. (European Commission, 2024)

FINEEC's evaluations **produce information and development recommendations for local, regional and national decision-making** and **development work** as well as for international comparisons. The evaluation activities comprise national learning outcome assessments, thematic and system evaluations and evaluations of quality systems. FINEEC also supports providers of early childhood education and care, education and training as well as higher education institutions in evaluation and quality management matters. FINEEC's evaluations are based on independence, trust, openness and interaction.

All FINEEC evaluation reports are public and available to download on the Centre's website. FINEEC informs the participants of the evaluation results and gives them feedback.

Sample-based national achievement tests in two or three subjects of basic education every year:

- Tests follow the National Core Curriculum.

- Every school is included in the sample once in every five years, covers about 10 % of pupils of the target age cohort each year.

- Local education authorities and schools get their own results, and they can decide how they use those results.

- National results are published as mean values – no possibility for ranking lists of schools – and as quality analyses.

- Results are used for development purposes – for improving curriculum, learning materials, teacher education etc.

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National quality evaluations

- Produce information for national and local authorities and for schools for their improvement work.

Self-evaluation of local authorities and schools

Self-evaluation is usually understood primarily as an assessment of the individual, community or organisation's own performance. Self-evaluation means the acquisition of information that an organisation collects about itself in order to describe and improve its own performance. **Its purpose is to improve the conditions for learning.**

The obligation of self-evaluation is based on the Education Act. It helps local authorities and schools to take responsibility over their own work - to plan, assess and develop systematically.

Positive Discrimination (PD) – Example of the development work to reduce inequalities

The socio-economic and demographic trends in Finland have put the funding system under increasing pressure. The rapid rise of immigration, aging population and the concentration of the population in urban areas are all factors that have profound implications for the provision and financing of public services, including education (OECD, 2018). There has also been a rise in socio-economic inequalities that was accompanied by growing concentration of wealth in specific areas, and of disadvantage and deprivation in others. This has led to a growing divide not only between rural and urban regions, but also increasingly within the same city, often following ethnic and linguistic lines (Bernelius and Huilla, 2021). Finland recognises the needs to target its funding more specifically in relation to the increasing diverse needs of its population.

The development of positive discrimination has taken place in a similar way as many development programmes in Finland. The model was first **piloted** on a large scale and **research was carried out** on the model, the results of which have been used. **International experience** has also been utilised. Only then have **amendments been made to the legislation**. The Right to Learn Programme is the government's response to this issue, as it aims at creating a sustainable and effective financing system through a structural and legislative reform (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

In international comparisons, Finland's strengths include the stability of institutional quality and segregation that is still manifestly moderate. Our system is well placed to invest in support for equality, in particular through systematic models of needs-based resource allocation and models of cross-sectoral co-operation.

Piloting PD model

The funding for schools in Finland is provided at the national level, but it is supplemented by municipal taxes. Municipalities are free to decide how to allocate funding - as long as they meet the minimum number of curriculum hours for each subject. The overall level of funding for education is determined by the municipal Council. The School Board then determines how the funding is distributed between schools in the municipality. At its core, funding is proportional to the number of students enrolled at a school.

The positive discrimination (PD) funding policy provides extra resources for schools that serve larger portions of low performing students. The first wave of the existing PD funding model was implemented in 2008 in the city of Helsinki. The first cohort of students potentially impacted by the funding graduating from basic education in 2009. Prior to the existing model, an earlier model functioned on the same premise - to provide extra resources to schools located in tougher areas – but operated with fewer funds and targeted a smaller and different group of schools. The newer model, like its predecessor, aims to support schools without tying current performance, as measured by test scores, to financial support. Instead, an index constructed using area-based characteristics that have been shown to correlate with school performance in Helsinki for several years determines the funding schools receive (Bernelius, 2013).

The characteristics that the PD index is calculated from are *immigrant share, parental education, income level, and the popularity of the school.* These characteristics are measured by catchment level indicators for the *percentage of adults without education past basic schooling, per capita income, as well as school level indicators for the percentage of non-native Finnish or Swedish speakers*. The popularity of the school is measured by the number of students who leave the catchment area for school compared to the number of students in the local school from outside the catchment area. Then, the level of extra resources is determined by the PD index value multiplied by the number of students in a school each year and a constant euro amount.

Principals are in charge of deciding how the extra resources of the school are spent. In most schools in Helsinki these decisions are then ratified by the governing board of the school, generally composed of the principal, teachers and other staff, parents, and often a student. Apart from reporting a breakdown of their budget to the School Board, principals and schools are not under pressures associated with performance-based accountability. Moreover, comparable test-based performance indicators between schools are not used. Interviews with school principals suggest that the primary use of PD funding is on additional non-classroom-teacher staff (Silliman, 2016): most importantly, classroom assistants rather than classroom teachers.

Research

Targeted funding programmes can be remarkably effective in improving the outcomes of immigrant and low-performing native students.

A study by **Mikko Silliman (2017)** indicates that Helsinki's positive discrimination funding policy, meant to eliminate social exclusion and targeted at specific basic education schools in Helsinki, has increased the likelihood that pupils continue their studies in secondary education, particularly among immigrant pupils and Finnish-speaking boys. Furthermore, a greater share of the pupils who seek secondary education in the schools that receive the funding continue their studies in general upper secondary school.

Silliman identified significant improvement in transitions to secondary education for low-performing native students and students from an immigrant background. As a result of the policy native students are 3 percentage points less likely to drop out of education after lower secondary education, and students from immigrant backgrounds are 6 percentage points less likely to drop out of education as well as 7 percentage points more likely to attend the academic track of upper-secondary school. The impacts of the policy are

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particularly large for male native students and female students from an immigrant background. The analysis suggests that these results are driven by improvements in non-academic skills rather than only in academic coursework. The results, robust to various checks, provide evidence that extra resources can be particularly effective when targeted towards students from an immigrant background.

The study shows that a minor investment can have a surprisingly large impact. In 2008, one in every three immigrant students in Helsinki did not continue their studies after the lower secondary education. The positive discrimination funding has decreased this share by one-fifth.

According to the results, the increase in high school acceptances is not due to simply better grades but being able to better grasp the opportunities available to them. The additional funding alone is not the key: the most important issue is how the schools use the funding. The schools in Helsinki that were part of the study use most of the positive discrimination funding to hire special needs assistants.

The study shows that the policy reduced the gap in dropout rate between pupils in schools receiving PD funding and other schools in Helsinki. A similar improvement in the dropout rate did not take place in schools with similar characteristics in other cities in Finland. In the study, the term 'similar schools' refers to schools that would have received positive discrimination funding based on the background of their pupils if the cities in which they are located had the same policy as Helsinki.

Educational equity, social and spatial segregation and opportunities for targeted support

The Ministry of Education and Culture commissioned a study for the work of the Right to Learn programme. Its aim was to examine the situation of equality in Finnish comprehensive school and early childhood education, in particular the challenges that have arisen as a result of social and regional disparities that have emerged during the 21st century.

The report (Bernelius and Huilla, 2021) examines equity in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and in basic education (primary and lower secondary education), particularly from the perspective of the challenges posed by social and regional disparities. The study also identifies the opportunities for support for ECECs and basic education schools. The key result is that the growing social and regional segregation in society challenges the systems of early childhood education and care and basic education at both local and national levels. In basic education, the growing differences in competence between both students and schools are a particularly worrying signal.

As a result of regional socio-economic and ethnic segregation, educational disadvantages are becoming localised in certain areas in a way that undermines the capacity of basic education schools that are geographically and socially marginalised to achieve good learning outcomes. Most of the schools at greatest risk are located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in big cities. The same dynamics of segregation can be seen in early childhood education and care, which impacts the disparate premises for equity from which the children then transition into basic education.

International Experiences

Recent trends suggest that Finland's considerable achievements may be at risk. The country's performance in international student assessments has been declining over the past decade, as gaps among student groups and levels of school segregation have grown. In light of these developments, Finland is advancing a number of policies, notably under the umbrella of the Right to Learn (RtL) Programme, to improve quality and equity in early childhood education and care (ECEC), pre-primary and basic education.

The analysis of OECD (2022) explores the Ministry of Education and Culture's (OKM) planned reforms in regard to the country's main education challenges and priorities. At the request of the Ministry, the analysis focusses on three main policy issues *financing equity and quality in education*, *expanding participation and strengthen quality in ECEC*, and *equalising education opportunities through strengthening the local school policy.* The analysis offers policy considerations aimed at strengthening the design and implementation of the RtL Programme.

According to OECD, Finland provides a number of grants that target different areas of the education system, in particular through application-based grants offered by OKM. Various grants are established and tenders are launched, routinely, in areas that relate to quality and equity in education, among others (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023).

These grants serve fundamental goals related to equity and inclusion priorities. Moreover, they have the merit of compensating passed years of financial austerity in education and providing significant sums to municipalities and schools. The Right to Learn Programme has supported this intention by establishing additional grants, to be administered on an application basis. However, having such an extended range of funding options creates a large administrative burden for stakeholders. Municipalities have capacity issues that in certain cases can prevent them from following through with the administrative processes. It can also affect the Ministry, as a large number of grants duplicate administrative efforts in the evaluation and selection of bidders, and in the allocation and monitoring of the funds and their use.

Recognising these limitations, OKM intends to put in place procedures that would allow need-based grants to be allocated on an automatic basis, as it suggested to the Parliament in April 2022. By simplifying the selection and allocation procedures, this could help streamline the funding process significantly (OECD, 2022).

According to OECD, the Ministry of Finance and OKM could collaborate to:

- Establish the principles that guide the central allocation of funds: ensuring a stable and transparent funding system requires stability and clarity in its principles (OECD, 2017).

- Ensure equal and effective education resourcing for municipalities: Finland should ensure the effectiveness of the equalisation system for the resourcing of the municipalities in the area of education.

- Ensure that targeted grants are used to complement the block grant with clear goals and principles (as discussed earlier).

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- Design a stronger monitoring and evaluation system: having set the principles driving the allocation system and ensured equalisation mechanisms for the municipalities, the government will be in a stronger position to develop an evaluation system.

Amendments to legislation

Working group to promote educational equality and positive discrimination in early childhood education and care, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education

The Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a working group to prepare measures to promote educational equality and **positive discrimination** in early childhood education and care, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education. The group was working **under the 'Right to learn' development programme** (OKM029:00/2020 STATUTE DRAFTING).

The tasks of the working group were to:

- prepare a legislative proposal to entrench measures **to promote positive discrimination** and equality as an effective part of the system of central government transfers for basic education;

- formulate a proposal to establish a model for positive discrimination in early childhood education and care;

- prepare measures to address the identified trends in disparities within schools and between schools as well as within cities and between regions;

- draw up proposals for measures on ways to strengthen educational equality at regional level, taking into account demographic trends, housing policy, regional developments and development of suburban areas;

- monitor and analyse the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in early childhood education and care and in primary and lower secondary education, in particular from the perspective of trends in equality and inequality, and to prepare related proposals for measures.

The projects under the Right to Learn programme served to amend legislation, make the financing systems more effective in early childhood education and care and in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, and seek effective procedures and practices to strengthen equality.

On 21 April 2022, the Government adopted its proposal to *introduce an equality grant, or needs-based funding,* into the Education and Culture Financing Act. The aim of the grant is to strengthen equality and equity in education.

Research shows that funding for educational equality has a positive impact on pupils' and students' progress in education. Grants are targeted in particular at areas where socio-economic factors may predispose to poorer learning outcomes. Equality grant is now being made a permanent part of Finland's education system, an important step towards a better quality and more equal learning pathway.

The Equality grant will strengthen the targeting of learning support precisely where additional efforts are needed. The funding will help tackle inequality in learning, which is the biggest problem in education in Finland today. While many children and young people are doing well at school, the proportion of low achievers has increased. The establishment of an Equality grant will increase the effectiveness and predictability of the grant in order to improve the planning and anticipation of equality actions at local level. At the same time, the reform aims to reduce the workload for education providers in the application process by allowing for a longer grant period at a time. The grant can be awarded for up to four years at a time. The consolidation of the Equality grant is part of the Right to Learn programme. The amendment came into force at the beginning of 2023.

Norway – A decentralised education system

The municipalities are responsible for kindergartens, primary and lower secondary schools. The counties are responsible for upper secondary schools. Of course, we also have a variety of private companies, and acts that regulate these.

The Directorate for Education and Training, Statped and National centres all have different tasks related to educational development.

Support from state level

Directorate for Education and Training (Udir)

The Directorate (Udir) has the overall responsibility for supervising kindergarten, education and the governance of the education sector, as well as the implementation of Acts of Parliament and regulations. Udir is responsible for all national statistics concerning kindergarten, primary and secondary education. Based on these statistics it initiates, develops and monitors research and development.

The objective of Udir is to ensure that all children, pupils, and apprentices receive the high-quality education they are entitled to. On 1 January 2018, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and the Centre for ICT in Education merged to become the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training – the Directorate for Kindergartens, Primary and Secondary Education and ICT. Udir is subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Research and is responsible for ensuring that the national education policy is implemented.

Statped

Statped is a state support service for municipalities and county municipalities and is directly subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Research. In addition to a variety of special education services, it provides professional advice to the Ministry on matters relating to the target groups and the special education disciplines. As a result of the white paper Meld. St. 6 (2019–2020)): Early intervention and inclusive communities in kindergartens, schools and after school programmes (SFO), the Parliament has decided that special educational competence should be closer to children and pupils. Statped and the municipalities are therefore in a restructuring process until the end of 2024.

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National centres

There are 11 national centres and the areas are multicultural education, foreign languages, art and culture, reading, learning environment, mathematics, science, Nynorsk, Sami education, writing instruction, and food, health and physical activity. Previously, the centres were subordinate to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, but today the centres are a part of the university sector, located under universities and university colleges across the country. Research is also conducted on the various disciplines. They have key roles in developing the quality of education and are part of the Norwegian support strategies. Their target groups include pre-school owners, leaders, teachers and staff; school owners, leaders and teachers; the educational–psychological services; teacher education institutions, as well as national policy makers. The goal is for all children, youths and adults to receive equal and individually adapted high-quality education in an inclusive community. Three examples:

The Norwegian Reading Centre is both a research centre within the Faculty of Arts and Education at the University of Stavanger, Norway and a National Centre, whose role is to contribute to the implementation of the Norwegian education policy. Research conducted at the Norwegian Reading Centre has direct impact on policy and practices related to language and literacy in Norwegian kindergartens and schools. Examples of what they have:

- adaptive assessment tools for better learning;
- mapping tests to identify the 20 percent lowest-performing students in reading and numeracy.

For more research findings, please see | University of Stavanger (uis.no)

The Norwegian Centre for Mathematics Education Its primary task is to lead and co-ordinate the development of new and improved working methods and learning strategies in the mathematics education, from kindergartens through teacher education in Norway. The Centre is a part of The Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Examples of what they can offer:

- a database of articles on mathematics education;
- support material on how to use results and content from national tests in arithmetic;
- 450 exploration and problem-solving activities for kindergarten and school (mattelist.no).

National Center for Multicultural Education (NAFO) The website morsmål.no offers free multilingual resources for use in kindergarten and school. Through co-operation with the field of practice, NAFO collects and develops resources for mother tongue-supported and multilingual work in kindergarten and mother tongue education and bilingual vocational training in schools. See: NAFO (oslomet.no). Please see more details in Section 8.

Quality development for improvement

The Directorate for Education and Training has the major responsibility for monitoring the quality of the school system in Norway.

School self-evaluation is the primary method of delivering school evaluation and improvement in Norway. There is a statutory requirement for schools to undertake self-evaluation. The Directorate for Education and Training presents data on a school/municipal/county/national level, grouped into five key areas: Learning outcomes, learning environment, completion of upper secondary education and training and resources and school facts. Data is used for quality development by all the responsible bodies but in different ways and to varying degrees of detail depending on the body. Sources are examination results and results from national tests.

The Directorate for Education and Training has developed school analysis tools for schools to help them review their practice. The school owners are required to implement a quality framework and ensure that their schools have self-evaluation processes in place. While practices vary, school owners typically operate an approach whereby they monitor results, require schools to submit annual plans and occasionally visit schools to conduct a 'quality dialogue' and check compliance of school policies with regulations. There are no national systematic inspections or external reviews of individual schools' improvement-work in general. However, the government inspection of school-owners includes controlling if schools do their self-evaluation in accordance with national regulations.

The County Governor´s Office carries out the inspections and publishes the inspection reports from public schools within their own county. The reports are available to the public and are used in local quality processes. They carry out supervision and legality checks, and handle complaints. In addition, they also have many tasks related to grant management, statistical work and development tasks at the system level.

When they start an audit of a school (inspections), they inform about which parts of the regulations they want to investigate and ask for the documentation from the school. Sometimes they ask the school itself to assess the extent to which the school complies with the regulations. The school will carry out this self-assessment in RefLex. Sometimes they visit the school to talk to management and staff. It can also be helpful to talk to students and parents.

RefLex is an online tool to help kindergartens, schools and municipalities assess whether their practice complies with the regulations in selected topics. Themes included in the tool are: Report need for special education / School-based assessment / School environment / The school's work with the pupils' learning outcomes / Special education: Plan, implement and follow up special education.

If they find breaches of the regulations, they summarise this in a preliminary audit report. This shows what rules the school has broken, and what the school should do to correct the practice. The school has the opportunity to comment on the content of the preliminary audit report, and normally has a two-week deadline for providing feedback.

After the feedback from the school is considered, they write the final audit report that contains the decision on what the school should correct and require the school to change its practices. The school must give feedback on how this is corrected. The school can appeal the decision.

All municipalities are covered by the grant scheme for local competence development in kindergartens and primary and secondary education and training. The grant scheme includes a decentralised and regional scheme for competence development in

kindergartens and schools, in addition to the competence enhancement for special needs education and inclusive practice. These schemes are intended to ensure competence development among school and kindergarten owners based on local analyses of needs.

The measures that you choose to initiate must be seen in the context of the analysis work that has been carried out in the pre-phase. By 'measures' is meant what you plan to do to improve the challenges revealed within the students' learning environment and learning outcomes.

Possible measures for the municipalities may be to continue and reinforce already ongoing measures, initiate new measures in co-operation with external centres of expertise, enter into regional co-operation on quality development with other municipalities and/or enter into an agreement with the County Governor on regional guidance.

Municipalities can apply for funding from the County Governor to implement and strengthen new or on-going measures.

The follow-up scheme to provide extra support

The follow-up scheme was established based on a white paper Meld. St. 21 (2016–2017)): The desire to learn – early intervention and quality in schools. The aim of the scheme is to provide support and guidance to municipalities that are below the lower limit for quality in key areas of education.

In 2020, 39 municipalities were identified, and the focus period was extended from two to three years. These municipalities completed a preparation phase in the summer of 2021 and will implement various measures in the following two years with a view to improving the quality of education.

Learning communities

When working with children and young people, complex challenges can arise that are difficult to meet alone. Complicated educational questions rarely have definite answers. Employees who together reflect on and assess the planning and implementation of educational programmes develop a greater understanding of good practice. This type of joint work is called learning community, professional community, collective competence development and developing practice together. Professional communities can be all employees, smaller groups and groups across units or departments. The Directorate for Education and Training has several tools to support this, such as:

- Questions to discuss: What does it mean to us to be a learning organisation? What does culture of change mean to us? What characterises a good meeting?

- Tools: Ideas on how to develop practice Academic article on management of quality work

- Films: Kindergarten-based competence development Facilitate professional communities School-based competence development

The kindergartens, schools and educational and psychological counselling services are the best ones to assess qualities, strengths, and needs. The universities/university colleges

shall be partners and contribute to research- and knowledge-based, workplace-based competence development. They are in partnerships dependent on each other.

Local competence development is through politically adopted schemes that will allow kindergarten and school owners to carry out development work based on their own needs in partnership with universities and university colleges (UH).

A partnership is intended to raise quality both in kindergartens and schools and in the universities/university colleges. The strategy is long term, and through the schemes they can create a common arena for learning and knowledge development. Employees in the kindergarten and school sector, in collaboration with the university sector, define and prioritise the skills development they need. At the same time, UH acquires practice-oriented competence, all in a local context.

Both the individual and the collective initiatives should be anchored in the learning community. There are several government schemes that support both individual and collective competence development. Kindergarten and school owners, and universities or university colleges, must co-operate on assessing competence needs and planning and implementing measures. Universities and university colleges that contribute to competence development must ensure that the experience gained from the partnership strengthens teacher education programmes.

We conduct several participant surveys. We have the pupil survey, the apprentice survey, the teacher survey, the parent survey and the adult survey to support quality development. Please see chapter on parents and family involvement.

Supporting inclusive practices

The Directorate for Education and Training and Statped has made guidelines to support inclusive practices.

Inclusion in schools is about all students experiencing that they have a natural place in the community. In order to achieve better inclusive pedagogical practice, schools must adapt their teaching in line with students' different prerequisites. Therefore, it is important that the school consciously adapt and differentiate, before special education is considered. The school must map, assess and, if necessary, try out new measures at school within the framework of adapted education. This is also specified in section 5-4 of the Education Act.

Students are dependent on being part of a learning environment that takes into account variations in their abilities and aptitudes. This also includes students who have difficulties related to language, skills and behaviour. Co-operation with parents, a good learning environment and a teaching practice that takes into account that the students learn in different ways and at different paces can prevent difficulties and remedy any difficulties when they arise.

Many of the needs for help and support can be met within the framework of differentiated teaching, which includes ordinary training and special education. The school must use their flexibility within the framework of ordinary training so that measures that promote learning and prevent difficulties are initiated. The framework of the municipality and county authorities determines the flexibility room.

The flexibility is about teacher density, teachers' competence, pedagogical practice and leadership at the individual school. How each municipality and county municipality utilise these resources is crucial for how schools can facilitate differentiated instruction. If the school does not have the necessary resources to adapt the ordinary training, the school should be provided with more resources before the case is referred to the educational and psychological counselling service for expert assessment.

Please also see the chapter describing resources from Statped and the Directorate to support inclusion and good learning environments.

Appointment of a new committee to develop a better-quality assessment system

The Government has appointed a committee to review and further develop the quality assessment system into a system that places more emphasis on professional and pedagogical quality development.

Quality development in schools shall contribute to all students receiving instruction in a school environment that is in accordance with the regulations, including the curriculum. The current quality assessment system consists of different tests, tools and data sources that have been introduced at different times and with different justifications and purposes.

The committee submitted a partial recommendation 31 January 2023, describing the strengths and challenges of the current system and an analysis of the needs of different levels for information and support to drive quality development. NOU 2023: Quality assessment and quality development in schools – A platform of knowledge. (NOU means Official Norwegian Report (not Green Paper). It highlights the following:

- Today, students, parents, teachers, school leaders, school owners, national authorities, researchers and the public have more common sources of knowledge about school and pupils' learning and well-being than before the introduction of the quality assessment system. It is a strength that the current system has contributed to a common knowledge base about the school, at the same time it is very extensive and does not cover well enough different needs for information and support to engage in quality development.

- The Committee has found that it is not easy to frame and describe what the current quality assessment system is, it is not clear what is included or whether it can be described as a separate system.

- There is varying knowledge about the different parts of the system. Since the quality assessment system was introduced in 2004, it has been changed, expanded, narrowed, evaluated and improved in various ways. Several of the samples, tools and data sources included in the system, such as national tests and PISA, are well known through research, debate and criticism. Others are less well known, researched and discussed. This means that there are large variations in the knowledge that exists about the different parts of the system.

- What is measured gets attention. While some actors point out that the system provides information about key and important parts of what the school should contribute to, other actors point out that the system does not safeguard the

breadth of subjects in the school. The Committee sees that the system can contribute to goal shifting in the sense that schools pay the most attention to the skills and competencies that the system measures and that the school's broad mandate is not sufficiently valued.

- Quality assessment and quality development in schools has been, and is, an area characterised by tensions. For example, there are tensions related to what is measured and what is not measured, between control and development, accountability and delegation, involvement and co-operation and political expectations. It has been important for the Committee to highlight and recognise the key tensions. Tensions are also a natural part of the field of education that provides the basis for further development and change.

- Most students find that they have a good school and learning environment characterised by well-being and support from the teachers. At the same time, the committee's review shows that students experience more pressure related to school than before, and that there is an increase in bullying. There are more young people now than before who do not enjoy school, and who state that they are bored and dread going to school.

- An important step in developing good school and learning environments is to include students in questions about quality assessment and quality development together with teachers, school leaders, school owners and other relevant actors. The Committee is of the view that it is positive that the proposed new Education Act emphasises that pupils have the right to participation in everything that concerns themselves, in accordance with age and maturity.

- The review shows that students, teachers, parents, school leaders, school owners and national authorities have several and to some extent different needs. A clear need for a majority of the actor groups is time, capacity and competence to analyse and compile information from samples, tools and data sources in order to interpret results and see them in context. This need is greater than the need for more data. The need for co-operation, dialogue and trust between the actors and within the stakeholder groups is also highlighted in both research and input from the sector as crucial to the success of quality development work.

The committee will submit a main recommendation with proposals for changes to the current tests, tools and data sources with the aim of facilitating quality development on around 15 October 2023.

Development and progress

In Norway the need for changes within education raises from the field, pilots research and politicians. Over decades there has been a high degree of political consensus in the field of education. Instead of radical changes, there often are small steps of improvement.

The Education Act. § 1-5 also opens up for applications from the municipalities or county municipalities, granting permission for deviations in connection with time-limited educational or organisational projects etc.

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Competence development has become one of the most important government instruments to ensure that children, pupils, and apprentices across the country receive a good kindergarten and school environment and high-quality education.

We are in a continuing decentralisation process. In broader and more general special education work, local level must take greater responsibility for building competence close to children and students.

The trust reform is an important part of the recent Government's work on renewal and development of the public sector. The aims of the reform are more welfare and better services through better use of resources and competence, reduce reporting requirements and micromanagement from above, trust-based leadership and service development based on the field of practice.

Sweden – Demands for equity and a combat between ideas of education

As described in chapter II, Sweden is in a situation of a demand for increased equity and at the same time two rather different ideas and strategies concerning how to handle this: one upholding the idea of creating a more 'common school' based on the critique of the marketisation of education, and another focusing on the importance of freedom of choice and independent schools. Underneath, seemingly a key question is, what shall the national state do in order to raise equity, when indicated that the financing capacity at local level differs hugely between different municipalities?

Some learning examples of handling the situation can be of interest for Italy, Portugal and Spain. Each element shall be seen as part of something larger, a whole system change:

Several efforts to strengthen the national governance are here elaborated:

1. ***The importance of formalising the role of Head of schools and providing national training from the start***

Based partly on the above-described knowledge, the Government in 2019 included and formalised the role of local authority-based *Head of schools*. Before, this actor's role was not defined in the law. The role is to be the local professional representative with responsibility to secure the visons, norms and qualities defined in the Education Act. That means both to inform and guide the local authority (political board in public schools and the board of independent schools) and the principals (from pre-school to adult education).

In order to strengthen this role, the Education agency together with three other national agencies in the education field, are responsible for both the norm setting and the production in the two-year training programme. This means a stronger 'control' by the national authorities than in the compulsory principal training (two years) produced by the universities, whereas the norm setting is done by the national Education agency.

So far, some 500 Heads of school have gone through the training programme covering the key aspects of the Education Act. The training is not just based on lectures, but mainly of collegial learning in groups in relation to each Heads´ own context, practice and results. Thereby, it is also a collective learning process followed and documented by researchers. The result so far is a much more solid knowledge base concerning the challenges and fruitful ways for Heads to think and act in complex situations.

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2. A common national quality system: quality dialogue between national and local level based on success factors, analysis and support for increased capacity

One promising feature is the initiative by the cabinet in 2020, demanding the national agencies to deepen co-ordination and collaboration in relation to the local authorities. This has resulted in the development of a *common quality system*, based on a systematic research review made by the School Research Institute. *Seven success factors* are formulated, and Indicators defined on *three levels*: local authority, principal and teacher level. This can be a shared wholistic understanding by a continuous quality dialogue between Education Agency, National agency for special needs education and schools, and each local authority. Based on the result of this dialogue, both general challenges and challenges for each local authority can be stated as a 'better ground for national support'. The focus will be to collaborate to increase the improvement capacity at local level and school level.

Success factors for effective school development

The success factors are part of the national quality system whose purpose is to create a focus on increased quality and equality in the entire school system. From research and proven experience summarise the success factors and prerequisites that are essential to prioritise in the work with effective school development. The overall aim is therefore that they should be starting points in the effort to create high quality and increased equivalence with teaching in focus. The success factors can also be used as a starting point in the work to meet requirements and regulations in the school's various governing documents. The success factors are intended to be used by all forms of school and for the leisure centre.

They must also form a basis for quality dialogues between principals and the National Education Agency and the Agency for special needs education and schools (SPSM). Because successful school development requires work that encompasses the whole, the school organisation needs the success factors to be read and understood in relation to each other and in relation to the operation's specific governing documents. An example on this is that student health is sometimes mentioned even though it is not compulsory in preschool or municipal adult education.

Another example is that guardians sometimes is mentioned despite the fact that it is not relevant within municipal adult education. The success factors are there for the entire chain of command. The success factors describe how the entire chain can work together. It is the local authority´s responsibility to create the conditions for all levels to work towards one equivalent education and high-quality teaching. Therefore, turns the success factors primarily to the local authority level. The authority level refers, in sequence of responsibility, to municipal council, municipal board, board of education or board of education of an independent school organiser and the function of head of schools.

Even if the success factors primarily address the local authority level they also affect other levels in the chain of command. At the principal's level, therefore, also deputy principal and others who are part of the management of a preschool or school are included. The teaching level can similarly include preschool teachers and teachers as special teachers and special pedagogues, student health staff, study and vocational counsellors or other professional groups that work with teaching tasks.

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The success factors can be used in the systematic quality work as one continuous and systematic support in planning, implementation and follow-up of the business. They can then be used to describe what an enterprise can do with to achieve quality and equality based on the specific needs that school activities have. The success factors can also be used in continuous collegial learning within all levels of an organisation. By doing a self-evaluation there is an initial responsibility build in the system. Such self-evaluation can together with other follow-ups, then form a basis for a current situation analysis. All in all, the documents can give a picture of which one's challenges that exist in the work to achieve equality and quality. It can also contribute to identifying and prioritising areas that need to be focused in its continued development work in relation to the national quality system. The ultimately most important is that children and students receive equal education and high-quality teaching.

The evidence-based success factors are:

- The creation of a trustful climate

- The creation of health promotive school environment

- The provision of efficient compensatory actions

- The promotion of competent leadership

- The organising of competence development based on needs

- Systematic quality work with the focus on the relation between teaching and learning

- An organisation with clear distribution of roles and responsibilities.

These factors are broken down into several indicators on each level of action: the local authority level, the principal and school level and the classroom level and are intended to be the focus in local self-evaluation at all levels and between levels. Based on this self-evaluation the quality dialogue between state agencies and the local authority takes place and point out local need of support for long term capacity building.

3. Investigation of the need for recentralisation: System responsibility and authority over schools?

Based on the recommendations from OECD (2015) and several commissions (2017 and 2020), a specific investigation was initiated in 2020, with the focus on how to increase equity in the education system. The investigation elaborates two different ways to handle the situation:

A. The national state strengthens its *system responsibility* for the education system, by one *system responsibility agency* (rather than 5), a national take-over of the financing by tax for all schools, and a take-over of authority for all schools.

B. The national state strengthen its *system responsibility* for the education system, by one system responsibility agency (rather than 5), a national take-over of the financing by tax for all schools, but with a kept order of public and independent authorities for schools at local level.

At the moment, all relevant stakeholders do have this proposal on their table and can react and respond.

4. *System change and improvement: a matter of deeper synchronisation*

In 2015 the national Education agency initiated a new kind of programme, 'Co-operation for the best school' (CBS). In between 2015-2023, 100 local authorities and several hundred schools have been involved in the programme (Rönnström and Johansson, 2021).

The problem was indicated by OECD and commissions to be a lack of equity. The aim for the programme was to increase the equity and to raise the pupil achievement. The key features were the initiative by the ministry which demanded more co-operation between the five national agencies. Based on the national school inspectorate's reports, a sample of 'the most disadvantage schools' were addressed. In charge was the national Education agency, who engaged more than 100 researchers as process supporters, together with the national agency's own staff. I each case the start was a deep local analysis of patterns and causes, followed by external support for improvement.

The main results contain 15 separate research studies, all put together in a book 'To improve schools with support in research' (Rönnström and Johansson, 2021), which can be summarised as follows:

- We often seek answers from the view of 'poor implementation', but rather we should realise that school improvement is about handling not 'simple problems', but 'wicked problems'.

- In a dual system as Sweden, there is a large focus on dialogue, in order to balance both state governance and local influence, and scientific knowledge and local knowledge.

- State governance is built on a fundamental assumption that there is a clear chain of command, which communicate political goals and signals down the chain. Rather governance is full of 'steering gaps'.

- It is important to adjust demands of change to the ongoing practice and therefore ask the question of timing and to analyse schools' preparedness to 'take external support'; it concerns both organisational and individual capacity to receive support!

- An analytical framework concerning the improvement capacity of schools is created.

- A tool for partnership (between principals and researchers) is developed as an alternative to the dominating view that practitioners in school shall apply general research results.

- All parts in this process are 'not used and trained' for this joint enterprise; there are necessity of collegial learning to learn for all! Not at least the use of methods for collegial learning on distance (in a widespread country).

- There is a need to develop a more systematic way to investigate and identify challenges in the relation between teaching and pupil learning, and use this information for improvement.

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- There is a need of a more holistic approach where the development of the core (*school development focusing on teaching and learning*) needs to *integrate the pupil health functions aspect* in the everyday work for wellbeing and learning. There is not enough organising different capacities aside of each other, it is foremost about synchronising them.

- There is a need of greater focus on subject didactical challenges in a more collaborative and investigating way: how can one create a more curiosity driven approach to teaching?

Challenges and results: 'equity is a buzzword…which has taken over the concept equality, but what does it mean?' (Johansson and Rönnström, 2021: 481)

- Focus in CBS has been the Systematic Quality Work (SQW), but this thought is built on the *assumption that there is a relatively functioning enterprise to improve*, but that is not always the case. Many schools have showed persistent and serious problems for years and school development has not been prioritised by the local authorities.

- Two books are produced so far: 1. To *lead schools* by support of research, 2. To *improve schools* by support of research. The editors state that *'It is now obvious that there is a need of one more publication on the theme.';* 3. To *reconstruct and organise* schools by support of research –about paths toward equitable schools.

6. Be aware of current questions at stake concerning governance

Over the last two decades, a number of areas have already been 'reclaimed' at national level, not least through the creation of the Schools Inspectorate. In response to the 2015 OECD report 'Improving Schools in Sweden', the Government appointed a School Commission. The final report (SOU 2017:35), proposed overarching subsidiary goals and quality indicators for the school system. The 'systematic quality work' stated in the Education Act shall aim to meet the national goals for education. This means that local school authorities/organisers, pre-school and school units must systematically and yearly follow up the activities, analyse the results in relation to the national goals and develop the education. The commission concluded:

> 'A prerequisite for the shared responsibility to work is that the distribution of responsibility between municipalities and the State is clear and has legitimacy, not only so that there is no ambiguity as to who is responsible for a certain issue, but also so that there is clear accountability. This is also something that the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions highlights. It is also important that public responsibility is at the right level, e.g. so that the allocation of resources to the school will be adequate in the long term, but also so that equity can be achieved.' (SOU 2020:28, p. 148)

Some academic research has found that the decentralisation of schools has had a negative impact on inclusion and equal opportunities in education by leaving the local policy decisions responding to students at risk of exclusion far too open to interpretation (Barow and Berhanu, 2021). Other policy decisions that have been pointed out as impacting inclusion in a negative way include the increased focus on grades and the use of nationally

administered exams to categorise students according to their achievement (or not) of marking criteria or minimum knowledge requirements to determine a need for special educational measures (*ibid.*) The free choice of school – whether independent or municipal – has been criticised for being free only for those who live within reasonable distance of 'popular' schools and mainly being a reality in densely populated areas with good public transport and a concentration of schools (Eriksson, 2021). Rural and sparsely populated areas, as well as some socio-economically challenged areas, lack any real choice when it comes to which school to attend. This geographic quality of the school choice tends to replicate existing segregation patterns (Fjellman, 2019). The public investigation, SOU 2019:40, ascribes slightly over a quarter of school segregation to this freedom to choose.

An investigation of the potential implications of a recentralisation of the administration of education or of strengthened state responsibility in education has been presented by the Government (Dir 2022:11; SOU 2022:53). The motivation for the inquiry was to assess the extent to which a recentralisation of education could ensure the delivery of a more equitable and higher quality education.

A new element was the introduction of public resource schools (SKR, 2021; SOU 2020:42), which allows not only independent schools to organise 'resource schools' to meet the need of certain groups of pupils. This feature can be seen as a strengthening of the local-level possibility of 'grouping', earlier by 'special teaching group'. There seems to be a conflict of ideas of what these groups and resource schools are an expression for: inclusion or exclusion?

Nordic network findings

Firstly, the Network studies focused on the **relation between national authority and local authority** in terms of governance and support. The main conclusion was *that it is not just about technical ´implementation´ of national policy, but rather about providing national support based on local authorities' own capacity to improve.*

> It seems right to provide the same type of national support to local authorities, but they are as diverse as pupils. Therefore, national actors need to pinpoint and lean on local analysis (at two levels: local authority level and school level).

> It is important to stimulate learning and sharing of experiences with the goal to create deeper and broader knowledge in terms of proven experience from practice (on how) in relation to research results.

> Provide the local authorities with a synthesis yearly of ´current knowledge´ (proven experiences and research results), rather than scattered stimuli of specific and singular research results.

> Design general support (financial, advisory and follow up studies) grounded on the synthesis of current knowledge and provide specific support grounded on local analysis.

Secondly, the Network focused on the **relation between local authority and schools** concerning governance and support and concluded: *It is not just about excellent*

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principals, but rather about building local improvement capacity, resilience and a sustainable system.

It seems to be that the ´right person´ with the right ideas, understanding and competence can handle the situation, but all principals are not that experienced, and therefore it is a great risk to let all principals ´do their own work´ in isolation.

The principals in successful schools in the study (Essunga, Maela, Oddeyrarskoli and Gislaved) show that one key factor is that they have organised *a school management team*, composed of two or three joint leaders, which ensure that they do not become ´lonely principals´.

Local authority support to principals has a positive effect on principals´ development and collegiality, which make the system less vulnerable to changes.

Principals can themselves transform and develop their school, by the energy from a school management team. However, there is a risk of discontinuity (principals ´moves´), without a supportive local authority. If the local authority is well organised and do synchronise principals learning there is possibility for systematic capacity building by collective proven experiences in the local community. The case of The Gislaved Spiral shows this necessity of support from local or regional school authorities to the principals, since they differ in their competence to lead toward greater inclusive capability.

Improvement of teacher education and training

Finland – Teachers as a resource

At the World Education Forum in Incheon in May 2015, the global education community, under the leadership of UNESCO, framed the priorities for a common education agenda within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the next 15 years. Participants in the Forum pushed for the Education SDG (SDG 4), aiming to

'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote life-long learning opportunities for all'.

To achieve this goal, the important roles of teachers and teaching for effective learning at all levels of education was acknowledged. That is why they committed to 'ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems'.

In-service education

The primary responsibility for continuing professional development (CPD) in Finland lies with the education providers. Teachers participate in obligatory training with full salary benefits. The state funds CPD that is important for implementing and promoting education policy aims.

Today teachers themselves have been given greater responsibility for developing their professional skills and expertise. More and more attention is paid to self-motivated CPD.

Teachers in general education are obliged to participate in a maximum of three days per year of CPD or school development under the collective agreements. The obligation to participate in CPD depends on the field of education. Participation in CPD activities does not provide teachers with formal benefits, such as salary increases or promotions. Part of the CPD is compulsory, but studies show that teachers participate in CPD much more than what is formally required. Thus, **their main motivation is professional development, updating and renewing their knowledge and competence** as well as professional ambition.

The Continuing education related to education policy and reforms

The State is primarily responsible for funding continuing education that is **important for implementing education policy and which promotes its aims**. Most of the funding is channelled through the Finnish National Agency for Education and the Regional State Administrative Agencies. CPD for those providing teacher training is funded directly by the Ministry of Education and Culture on the basis of applications from these providers.

Continuing teacher education (CPD) is organised by different types of training centres such as university continuing education units, university departments of teacher education, teacher training schools, summer universities and various private organisations.

Continuing education is largely based on the logic of supply and demand. The number of applications for continuing education programmes focusing on the priorities of education policy is considerably higher than the capacity for funding such programmes.

Teachers have the responsibility and power of decision for participating in the education and they may receive support from society in the form of various study grants. Teachers especially favour continuing education that helps them update their professional knowledge in their own subject or field of vocational education and training.

The challenges

Inclusion has been discussed extensively in public. In many cases the ideal of inclusive education has been viewed as an explanation for negative developments including teachers' burnout and restless classrooms. If there were enough special education teachers, counsellors and social workers, a significantly larger share of students with special needs could participate in regular classes in their neighbourhood schools. Often, the decision to transfer a pupil to a special needs class is based on school resources, not the student's needs. There should be structural changes.

Most teacher students only take one general course on inclusion and special education. The content of teacher training will be reviewed in the coming years, but inclusion faces severe competition from other potential course additions, including digitalisation and sustainability. The degree can only accommodate a finite number of new topics.

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive schooling have been studied intensively. Major findings are that attitudes towards inclusive education are important for the implementation of inclusive education and that attitudes are influenced by teachers' knowledge of disabilities as well as by their experience of inclusive education. Many researchers have stressed that teachers' attitudes play a key role in the implementation of successful inclusion (Mieghem et al., 2018; Schwab, 2018).

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According to a study (Saloviita, 2018), only 22 percent of Finnish teachers view inclusion favourably. Including students with behavioural disorders in regular education is considered particularly difficult. Teacher students also feel unprepared to address behavioural problems.

Saloviita has compared the attitudes of different groups of teachers to different statements, giving a slightly different picture of the situation. The results of the study can be assessed from teachers' responses to the following statements made by Saloviita and come to a different conclusion.

The agreements and disagreements in percentages for items by teacher category.

Table 1. Statement: Children with SEN can be effectively supported in mainstream classrooms

	NO	YES
Subject teachers (N = 575)	40	45
Class teachers (N = 824)	30	57
Special teachers (N = 385)	20	71
Total (N = 1,764)	31	56

Table 2. Statement: The education of students with SEN should be arranged in the mainstream

	NO	YES
Subject teachers	42	40
Class teachers	34	51
Special needs teachers	20	70
Total	33	52

Savolainen et al. (2022) summarises various studies teachers have many concerns about implementing inclusive education in practice, especially when it comes to managing challenging student behaviour. Surprisingly, according to Saloviita's study, the majority of teachers think that children with ADHD should study in mainstream classrooms.

Table 3. Statement: Children with ADHD should be in mainstream classrooms

	NO	YES
Subject teachers	35	40
Class teachers	29	49

	NO	YES
Special teachers	22	61
Total	29	49

(Special needs teachers work both in mainstream classes and special classes).

Thus, different interpretations can also be made of Saloviita's data.

According to Saloviita (2018) one can see that even if teachers' general attitude towards inclusion is rather negative, a majority believes that children with SEN can be effectively supported in mainstream classrooms. Also, only a minority believes that the best result is achieved by placing the student in a special education classroom.

The more critical attitudes of subject teachers towards inclusion can be understood through their perhaps greater emphasis on subject matter instead of student development. Subject teachers instruct several student groups and have many times more students than the other two teacher categories. Their students are also older on average and represent a larger variability of skills due to their age level. Inclusive education has been criticised as causing extra work for teachers. It may be that, for special-education teachers, inclusion does not signify a similar threat of additional workload as for classroom and subject teachers. (Saloviita, 2018).

According to Savolainen et all (2022) it seems that the rhetoric on support has shifted towards a more inclusive direction, but there is opposition to inclusion, as clearly shown in the public media before the parliamentary elections (2019 and 2023). The arguments against inclusive education are the same as before, highlighting the increased workload of teachers and somewhat more implicitly that they do not have the necessary skills for inclusive education. The Trade Union of Teachers in Finland, OAJ, has been one of the loudest and certainly the most politically potent forces of this criticism.

Norway

Initial teacher education

The right to inclusive education and that education must be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual student is imbedded. Therefore, this is consistent in all teacher education, both initial and further as well as in subjects.

Teacher education programmes are grounded in the The Kindergarten Act and the Education Act as well as in the Framework Plan for Kindergartens and school curricula. National regulations and guidelines for teacher education all emphasise adapted education and inclusiveness. Hence it contains elements of special needs education. Teacher education programmes shall ensure that the student gets the necessary skills, knowledge, and competence in order to create a safe psychosocial school environment and prevent discrimination.

Examples on learning outcomes – The graduate should:

- be able to create inclusive and health-promoting learning environments that contribute towards good academic, social and aesthetic learning processes;

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- analyse, evaluate and document pupils' learning, provide constructive feedback, adapt the teaching to the pupils' individual abilities and needs;

- have knowledge how to further develop class management the pupil's basic skills, and assessing pupils' learning;

- take early action and ensure progression in the development of pupils' basic skills and subject knowledge, he/she has knowledge of relevant legislation and of children and young people's rights in a national and international perspective.

It highlights inclusive education and adaptation throughout the years, i.e. variation, for example through work tasks, learning material, intensity of training, organisation of the training, learning materials and working methods. Learning in subjects shall be adapted to the individual pupil's abilities and aptitudes, and the education must ensure that the student acquires competence in adapting the instruction to the diversity of the student group. Included in this is knowledge of students' right to exemption from the curriculum that entails the development of individual educational goals.

The subject Profession-oriented pedagogy or special education shall, in conjunction with the subject Pedagogy and pupil knowledge, help students to expand knowledge and skills in the educational and special education area as a basis for teaching and reflection on key pedagogical issues. The subject shall also determine the basis for a master's degree in educational or special education, aimed at teaching and learning in an inclusive and diverse learning and teaching environment. Many newly educated teachers therefore have many credits in special education and inclusion as part of their initial teacher training. This is important due to the fact that all classrooms are diverse.

As part of a reorganisation of teacher education in Norway, Parliament decided in 2009 to introduce a 'system with obligatory partnership agreements between teacher education institutions and kindergarten/school owners which clarify roles, responsibilities and mutual obligations with regard to the practice training'.

University schools are a collaborative project between the primary and lower secondary teacher education programme at a teacher education institution and selected practice schools, intended to create a closer partnership between the schools and teacher education and ensure equivalence between these two learning arenas.

At the same time, it has also become clear that many partnerships appear to rely on the commitment of individuals and on vulnerable, project-based resources. A research summary of partnerships in teacher education has concluded that there is generally speaking 'still a need for innovation, more attention to structures, and better co-ordination of the partnerships'. One important recommendation made by the expert panel on the role of the teacher is indeed that further work is needed to strengthen partnerships on teacher education between higher education and schools.

On that basis, the Government intends to develop a national framework for partnerships between teacher education institutions and kindergarten and school owners regarding teacher education schools and teacher education kindergartens. The framework will be based on experience gathered to date and will facilitate the continued operation of existing partnerships. The specifics of the organisation and academic content must be decided by the relevant local partners.

Teacher competence and requirements

To be permanently employed as a teacher in primary and lower secondary school, one must have teacher training or other approved education. In selected subjects, a certain number of credits are also required in order to teach.

Competency requirements

From the yearn 2015 teachers who teach Norwegian, mathematics, English, Sami and Norwegian Sign Language must have 30 credits relevant to the subject in order to teach at primary level, and 60 credits relevant to the subject in order to teach at lower secondary level. Those who graduated before 1 January 2014 have had exemption from these requirements until 1 August 2025.

Among the teachers with approved teacher training, there still is a big number that do not meet the competence requirements for the subjects they teach. The proportion is highest in English, where 31 per cent of teachers do not meet the competence requirements. In mathematics, the proportion is 19 per cent, while it is lowest in Norwegian with 14 per cent. In Norwegian Sign Language, 17 per cent do not meet the competence requirements.

The proportion of teachers who meet the competence requirements has increased steadily since 2015–2016. The increase has been greatest in lower secondary school. From 2015 to 2021, about 24,000 primary and lower secondary school teachers were offered further education among others to meet the competence requirements.

The present Government has also decided that teachers who have been trained before 2014 will be exempted from the competence requirements to teach mathematics, English and Norwegian.

Mentoring grants for newly hired kindergarten teachers and teachers

In 2022, 9 million NOK (900,000 euro) was allocated to measures to supervise newly hired qualified kindergarten teachers and teachers. All universities and university colleges with teacher training were eligible to apply.

The grant is intended to help newly qualified teachers in primary and lower secondary schools receive good guidance and make the transition from education to the teaching profession easier.

Further education for teachers

All In order for the competence measures to work well, the measures must be based on the teacher's and instructor's experience, knowledge, and attitude to the profession, and to the relevant context in the kindergarten or school. The measures must be closely linked to the framework plan, curricula, and national and local goals.

Characteristics of quality in the measures

The research defines some characteristics of competence development measures that are of high quality and have a lasting effect on teachers' practice.

Characteristics of effective competence development:

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1. Long-term effort

2. Testing and reflection on new practice

3. Coherence between teachers' values and views on learning, what is communicated through the curriculum, and the curriculum

4. Collaborate on the development of the professional community

5. Relevant content both academically and pedagogically.

The state-supported schemes for competence development cover both further education and continuing education.

Further education is individual and is intended to increase the individual's formal competence. Continuing education does not provide formal competence but aims to increase the organisation's and the individual's competence.

For kindergartens and schools to develop in the desired direction, individual and collective competence measures must be planned in context based on defined needs.

Work-based competence development is measures that are implemented in the workplace in schools or training establishments. The workplace is used as a learning arena to promote individual and collective processes for professional development.

Collective competence development – developing practice together

The work on quality is a lasting learning process, where kindergartens and schools develop their pedagogical practice. Teachers, leaders, and other employees must reflect on common values. They shall assess and further develop their practice by setting goals and making plans, implementing measures, testing new practice, and evaluating the measures.

Kindergarten and school owners have the overall responsibility for this work. Leaders and principals, in co-operation with teachers and staff, must establish and develop co-operation in the individual kindergarten and school.

Developing professional learning communities is about shifting attention from the individual kindergarten teacher, teacher and instructor to the community and all staff. It is also about asking yourself and others exploratory and open-ended questions to find answers that can contribute to learning and development.

1. The grant scheme for local competence development in kindergartens and schools supports collective competence development.

2. The grant scheme for local competence development in vocational education and training supports both individual and collective competence development.

Examples on how to facilitate the development of good professional communities is available in links at the directorate site.

Individual competence development

Further education for teachers, managers and other employees in kindergartens and schools shall contribute to good academic and pedagogical quality.

The postgraduate study programme is individual and gives the participants credits. Further education for teachers in schools is largely linked to the requirement for relevant

competence in all school subjects. There are also Government further education programmes that cut across school subjects, including vocational education and training.

Kindergarten and school owners should facilitate that individual competence development can also support goals for collective competence development for the entire kindergarten or school.

The teachers who have taken further education report high learning outcomes, such as more reflection on their own practice and increased involvement in the work. Fewer feel that further education has been positive for co-operation at school.

Main findings:

1. The postgraduate study programme is perceived as relevant and of good quality.

2. Learning outcomes are high, but lower when it comes to training in the use of digital resources.

3. Motivation and own efforts are important for learning outcomes.

4. There is great variation in the perception of knowledge sharing.

5. Many teachers are satisfied with the adaptation.

Almost 80 per cent feel that the content of the education is relevant to their everyday work. More than half respond that the studies have combined theory and practice in a good way and that they have been close to practice. More than 80 per cent perceive the quality of their further education as very good or good.

Most teachers report high learning outcomes, such as more reflection and increased engagement in the work. More than a third disagree that further education has made them better at integrating digital resources into their training. There is a relatively large disparity between the professional groups.

Answers to questions about knowledge sharing indicate significant variation between schools. The culture of knowledge sharing is weak in relatively many schools. This has been found repeatedly in previous editions of the Participant Survey.

Teachers experience a weaker culture for knowledge sharing than vocational teachers and kindergarten teachers.

Teacher specialists

The teacher specialist scheme was introduced as a pilot in 2015. The purpose was to raise the status of the teaching profession and strengthen the professional community in schools. Teachers are given the opportunity to specialise in subjects of their choice. At the same time, they gain competence that makes them better equipped to develop their own teaching, and to contribute to development processes in the school community.

School owners have been offered financial support for 1,818 teacher specialist functions in the 2021–2022 school year. These are divided into the following subjects or subject areas:

• 380 are associated with natural sciences

- 412 are affiliated with Norwegian with emphasis on reading and writing instruction
- 145 are affiliated with beginner training
- 83 are affiliated with the practical aesthetic subjects
- 270 are affiliated with professional digital competence
- 85 are associated with the training of minority language students
- 105 are associated with English and/or 2nd foreign languages
- 49 are affiliated with guidance
- 115 are affiliated with special education
- 15 are affiliated with teacher training.

The present Government has announced that the teacher specialist scheme with a new party-based scheme.

The Government will initiate a study in dialogue with the parties such as teacher unions, The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities etc., for a new scheme for career paths in schools. The scheme will, among other things, build on experience with the pilot scheme with teacher specialists. The final report from the evaluation and other experiences from the teacher specialist pilot will be an important part of the knowledge base.

The state will continue to fund study places for participants who are already in the process of teacher specialist training. Teachers shall be freed from their ordinary duties corresponding to 37.5% of full-time positions. Costs for travel, accommodation, learning materials and the like must be covered by the school owner. For teachers who are in office this school year, the state will still fund 2/3 of the pay increase.

The final report from the evaluation of the teacher specialist scheme showed that the participants were satisfied with the programme, and both teachers and principals feel that the education is relevant to the function.

The teacher specialists in the function spend most of the time they have at their disposal to update themselves on their field of study, on subject didactic topics, on school development and school research, and on alternative forms of teaching. Many state that they often participate in the planning or implementation of development projects related to the school's focus area, and that they take the initiative to increase the competence of their colleagues in their own field.

The teachers in the function report to a greater extent that they are motivated by internally driven motives, such as professional development, new challenges and solving the school's challenges.

Teacher specialists spend an average of 3.6 hours a week on the function About half of the principals report that they expect the teacher specialists to spend somewhat less time on the function compared to what the teacher specialists report using.

Teacher specialists also report that there is a lack of clarity about their role as a specialist, and how much they are expected to spend on it.

There are divided views on whether the scheme is perceived as a career path. More than half of the teacher specialists state that the function has motivated them to continue as a teacher at their own school. The teacher specialist education is to a greater extent perceived as career development, as this entails formal qualification in the form of credits.

Further education for school leaders

An important task and challenge is to develop and lead the professional community (link), and get everyone involved in the development of competence and good practice. It is the management's task to facilitate the assessment of needs and prioritisation of measures in dialogue and co-operation with the employees, and to ensure the necessary time and resources to follow up and implement the measures.

Competence in leadership and organisational development is an important prerequisite for successful development work. This is emphasised in the further education programmes for leaders in kindergartens and schools.

This school leader education programme covers the competence areas students' learning environment, management and administration, development and change, professional community and co-operation and the leadership role. Within each of the five competence areas, work will be done on values and principles, research on school development and leadership and the capacity to fulfil the role of school leader.

Students' learning environment provides knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning. Focus will be placed on the school's learning and curriculum work and in leadership of improvement and change at the individual school. Another key theme will be the development of a good and inclusive school environment that can contribute to positive learning and development for the individual student.

Development and change is about quality in the school's practice. The work on pedagogical analysis will provide skills in using mapping tools as a basis for analysis and development of measures.

Professional community and co-operation shall provide knowledge about what a professional community is, what it means within a school context and what leadership challenges may arise in the management of such communities. Leadership role provides knowledge on how to develop role understanding and leadership identity. The first participant survey for the module-based further education for school leaders and kindergarten leaders shows that school leaders and kindergarten leaders are highly motivated. At the same time, they report that it is demanding to take further education on top of daily tasks and responsibilities. Almost 9 per cent drop out of the programme, which is higher than for the other further education programmes.

As much as 70 per cent of the participants state that their financial expenses were covered. At the same time, about 80 per cent say that they were not relieved of tasks in their daily work while they were at a gathering. The study therefore comes on top of responsibility in the job, and so many feel compelled to give lower priority to studying when everyday work becomes demanding.

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A large majority of the participants confirm that competence development is given high priority in the workplace. They also say that it is easy to try out what they have learned in their education.

Kindergarten administrators report to a significantly greater extent that than participants from school that the level of ownership has planned for knowledge sharing from management education.

More than half say that trying out new practice in their own workplace has been very important for their learning outcomes.

Do we have enough qualified teachers in the future?

Statistics Norway do analysis every three years. Up to now, high teacher deficit has been predicted. However, the last analyses project a teacher surplus up to 2040. It is only for primary school teachers that we calculate a deficit until 2025. Low and partly negative growth in the number of future children and adolescents (which constitutes the demand side of the model) explains a surplus of teachers.

Some challenges

Newly qualified teachers in schools in Norway often earn better than colleagues in other countries, while those with long seniority often earn less than the OECD average when adjusted for purchasing power (OECD 2016).

There are teacher shortages in some areas. The teacher unions as well as the authorities are worried about the number of unqualified teachers. Some have low qualifications, while others are having qualifications as social workers etc.

Sweden – Strengthen the in-service, in-context and whole system approach to development

The importance of design training that use the capacity in context and in-service

Problem and aim: a need to support teachers' capacity to meet diversity, but the teacher education is not enough.

Key features and results:

A. 'Special pedagogy for learning'(SFL): a 2015, complementary intervention concerning teacher training:

Step 1: One year programme for compulsory school, owned and financed by national agency, supported by all national agencies and universities→teacher collaboration under the supervision of a trained 'process supporter':

- *good but not persistent outcome, since local authority, principals and specialist functions was not involved.*

Step 2: One year programme for all school forms and with mechanisms to engage local authority, principals and specialist functions 'in real context':

- *deeper and more persistent outcomes – capacity building for sustainability.*

B. Profession Programmes for preschool, school teachers and principals (maybe a programme also for Heads of school), 2023. https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2023/01/prop.-20222354/)

Challenges ahead: how can local authorities and schools with lower improvement capacity take care of the new competence developed by SFL and profession programmes?

Transferable learning: the key seems to be to *create a steady frame for improvement at local authority and schools, that can take care of teachers new competence and sustain a new 'thought-action-mode'*

The importance of not one model, but rather local analysis, local capacity building and community of learning

In 2012, Ifous, a Swedish non-profit research institute, initiated a large-scale, longitudinal R&D programme on inclusive learning environments in schools. The programme involved 12 municipalities and 31 schools in Sweden, as well as national advisors and researchers following the process. The general research conclusion from the programme was that there is no single model to follow in order to develop more inclusive learning environments; *each school must do their own process, by exploring the concept of inclusive learning environments and by analysis of the school's position and conditions* (Tetler et al., 2015).

The conclusion about creating more inclusive learning environments is that greater inclusive capability requires a systematic and co-ordinated development process on several levels over time. It is fundamental that there is a strong process of creating a common understanding of challenges, causes, alternative ideas and work modes, which is owned by all actors: local politicians, development support functions, pupil health team, principals and teachers, pupils and their parents (Skoglund et al., 2015; Tetler et al., 2015).

In 2017–2019, Ifous ran another programme consisting of seven municipalities and 42 preschools and schools. Nine research studies on how to raise inclusive capability showed replicated results from the first programme. A shift is indicated concerning the concept of inclusion. After the programme, the focus was more on the interaction between the pedagogical environment and the pupils, but:

'Despite this, efforts in many of the municipalities are directed toward single pupils with diagnosis and difficulties. One challenge is still to handle the tension between the programme´s ambition, the local school authorities' sayings about inclusive learning environments and what actually is done in preschools and schools…In order to breakthrough all the way to the practice, it is important that both the individual as well as the collective capacity is strengthened on all levels of the organisation.' (Persson, 2020, p. 11f).

The importance of a local whole-system strategy in relation to a national compensatory training programme for teachers

The importance of a *local whole-system strategy (LWSS)* is also illustrated in an eight-year follow up study of one mid-size municipality in west Sweden. The study firstly shows how the municipality, through an energetic, skilled and creative department for learning and development support, first strengthen its own ability to work from an action-learning and

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process support perspective as facilitators for practice. They trained at least two process supporters at each school who worked in order to support inclusive practice.

Secondly, the study followed a national state development programme initiative, designed to compensate the deficit in both teacher education and practice, named 'Special pedagogy for learning'. The focus in the programme was to increase teachers' knowledge, understanding, skills and collaborative ability, concerning pupils in need of special support, due to functional disabilities or/and other causes. The study explored that to have long-term outcomes from a national development programme, it is not enough to engage and train process supporters who lead dialogue in teacher teams. The local authorities (head of schools), the principals and the schools PHT need to be deeply involved. To make local school systems function in a more inclusive way, *it requires neither top-down, nor bottom-up strategies, but rather a combination of them both* (Andersson, Ferm and Skoglund, 2020, pp. 21–23) via the following:

- A central, common framework with conceptual clarity and an assignment to all schools to develop inclusive capability.

- Central development support functions that can co-ordinate the processes, the learning between parts and train selected staff members at each school in process leadership.

- Adaptation to local circumstances, challenges and needs of support, based on a local analysis of quality of the learning environment and its current outcomes.

- A continuous dialogue focused on the quality provided and the pupils´ achievement, between levels (teacher–principal–head of schools–local politicians).

The findings from this study did influence the national development programme´s second phase, which resulted in a focus not just on compulsory school, but all school forms from pre-school to adult education. It also resulted in a clearer governance which pinpointed the importance and responsibility of the local authorities, principals and the schools´ PHT in order to build a local contextual framework around the national programme. Thereby, the sustainability of the learning from the programme could be better secured.

These findings are closely related to some results on the general field of 'successful schools' (Höög and Johansson, 2011, 2014; Jarl et al., 2017). There seems to be a widespread agreement that successful schools are characterised by goal and result orientation, consensus and co-ordination between the local authority (political board, head of schools) and principals who have the capability to build trust between the levels. Underneath it all, Höög and Johansson (2014) point at four sub-systems that have to be co-ordinated: structure, culture, politics/power and individuals (motivation and cognition). This supports the findings of Ainscow and Sandill (2010) pointing out the importance of leadership, co-ordination and professional learning processes that promote school development:

> …the starting point must be with staff members: in effect, enlarging their capacity to imagine what might be achieved, and increasing their sense of accountability for bringing this about. This may also involve tackling taken-for-granted assumptions, most often relating to expectations about certain groups of students, their capabilities and behaviours…Our argument is, then, based on

the assumption that schools and their communities know more than they use and that the logical starting point for inclusive development is with a detailed analysis of existing arrangements. This allows good practices to be identified and shared, whilst, at the same time, drawing attention to ways of working that may be creating barriers to the participation and learning of some students. However, as we have stressed, the focus must not only be on practice. It must also address and sometimes challenge the thinking behind existing ways of working (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010, p. 412).

Organising and utilisation of specialist and support functions

Finland – Services for the mainstream schools to support inclusive education

The Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education (CROSP) project was carried out by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. The project focused on the re-organisation of specialist provision to support the right to inclusive education for all learners. The project's overall aim was to identify and analyse challenges and opportunities within country policy and practice that influence the re-organisation and reform of specialist provision towards inclusive education for all learners.

Instead of placing learners who need support in special settings, education systems are moving towards expecting mainstream education professionals to meet diverse needs (European Agency, 2015; Council of the European Union, 2018). Instead of special classes or special schools, the rights-based approach requires mainstream professionals to promote educational change to effectively meet all learners' needs within mainstream classes (European Agency, 2013; 2016; 2017).

In mapping specialist provision approaches in European countries (CROSP project, phase 1) data analysis highlighted **the need to further enable specialist provision to act as a resource for mainstream provision and to equip stakeholders to implement inclusive education.**

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Consultancy services at different levels of education

5. Vision: The joint consultation with social and health care (some pilots are starting)

4. The joint consultation (we are piloting)

3. Consultation from one consutation center

2. Municipal level consultation

1. School level consultation – special needs teachers in every school

Figure 9. Consultancy services at the different levels of education

Services for local schools have long been developed in Finland. As part of the VIP development project (Right to Learn program) and in line with the Agency's CROSP project, this work continued and was further developed in 2018-2022. The development work has been supported by government grants and funding for in-service training of education staff.

As part of the Right to Learn project, **a four-level consultation and support model has been developed** to build on previous development work.

School level consultation and support

There is/are special education teacher/s in **every school.** According to legislation: *A pupil who has difficulties in learning or school attendance is entitled to special needs education alongside other instruction.* So called part-time special needs education is provided for pupils with problems relating to linguistic or mathematical skills, learning difficulties in individual subjects, study or social skills or in their school attendance.

Part-time special needs education is provided through flexible arrangements as team teaching, in a small group or individually. It is planned and pupils' learning is assessed in co-operation between teachers. Part-time special needs education may be provided at all levels of support. Nowadays, the work of a special needs teacher increasingly involves consulting and co-teaching with other teachers.

Municipality level consultative teachers

In municipalities, the posts of special class teachers have been transformed into consultant teachers, available to all schools. These teachers come to help in the classroom when there is a particularly challenging situation, and the teacher can no longer cope.

The starting point is to support the pupil in his or her current group, in his or her local school. If further expertise is needed in the school to help structure the situation and plan the teaching arrangements, a consultant special needs teacher will be contacted in due time. This consultation will strengthen the professional skills of the teachers working with

the pupil. Consultative work always precedes any other arrangements or change of placement. These municipality level consulting teachers can observe, assess the situation, co-teach and give advice, materials, learning devices etc. to the class or subject teacher.

Objectives and forms of consultation:

The aim of the consultation is to support the child's and young person's schooling and to identify, on a case-by-case basis, the most appropriate forms of support in co-operation with the school, the pupil, the carer and any network. Consultation can also be requested on a preventive basis if the school has concerns about an individual pupil or a group of pupils. The purpose of the consultation is to support school staff to ensure that as many pupils as possible attend their local school.

The aim is to strengthen the support skills of staff in pre-primary education and local schools, to develop preventive and early intervention approaches and to change the culture. In addition, the aim is to develop and strengthen multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary co-operation in order to support the implementation of inclusion.

Finnish National Agency for Education has financed the training for these consultative teachers.

Consultation from one centre

Valteri, National Centre for Learning and Consulting

Valteri is a national Centre for Learning and Consulting that operates under the Finnish National Agency for Education. The main plans for the performance management of the Finnish National Agency of Education for Valteri are the revenue agreement and the budget. The most important monitoring documents are the financial statements, in particular the activity report.

Valteri supports inclusive education by offering a wide range of services for the needs for general, intensified and special support. Valteri has a long and extensive history of developing consultancy and training services for local schools. Valteri's work is therefore presented in more detail here.

Together with the pupils' home municipalities, Valteri promotes the school attendance of those who require support with the multidisciplinary expertise and provides versatile services for any general, intensified and special support needs. The aim is to enable as many pupils as possible to go to school in their home municipality and in their neighbourhood school. Valteri's services can be focused on the needs of individual children or young people, or for the needs of an entire work community, municipality or region. Valteri has six units located in different parts of Finland.

Partnerships and networking are the guiding principles of the activities. Valteri works together with the Finnish National Agency for Education as well as educational providers on the regional and local level. The partners include e.g. actors in the social and health care sector, third sector actors, universities and higher education institutions, as well as Regional State Administrative Agencies.

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VALTERI

FINNISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

We operate nationally.

Our services are used by 70% of Finnish municipalities.

Teaching

Support services for pupils

Others

Social and health

Over 550 professionals work at Valteri.

Valteri is a national Centre for Learning and Consulting that operates under the Finnish National Agency for Education. Valteri supports the neighbourhood school principle by offering a wide range of services for the needs for general, intensified and special support.

We provide services to early childhood education and care, basic education and additional education.

Approximately 2500 pupils are within the sphere of our services, 13% of whom study at Valteri schools.

We cooperate with approximately 40 different partners in education and research.

Figure 10. About Valteri

Valteri has six units located in different parts of Finland.
Ruskis and Skilla are located in Helsinki in the same building. Finland have two official languages. The working language of Ruskis is Finnish and the language of Skilla is Swedish.
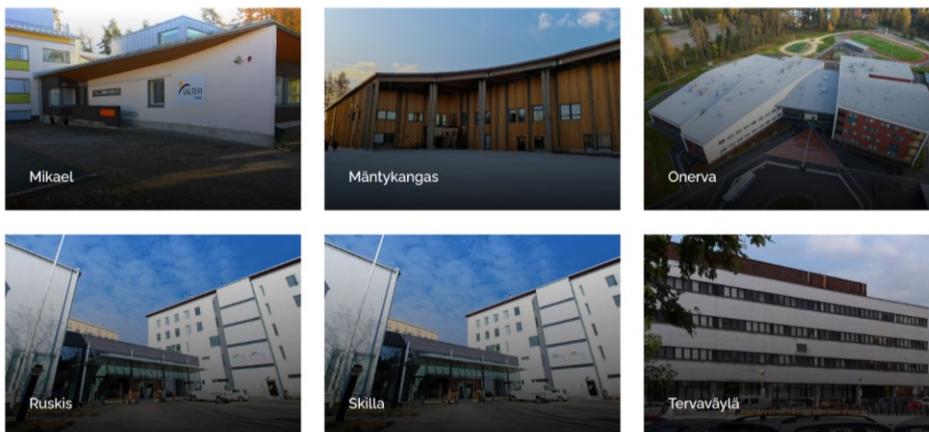
Figure 11. Valteri's six units

Consultations

Together with the customers (teachers, schools, municipalities), Valteri's experts plan and develop solutions of varying scope at municipality and school level. The consultation

processes are implemented exactly according to the needs. For example, their themes can include:

- planning and implementation support for pedagogical projects that are conducted on the national level;
- arrangement practices, teaching structures, co-ordination and consultation for student support;
- developing pupil welfare;
- pedagogy and learning environments that are in compliance with the National Core Curriculum;
- developing a school and its operational culture.

The development process can include for example:

- assessing development needs;
- coaching support, sparring, training and consultation for project leaders, steering groups and working groups;
- work guidance or other types of expert support for principals, teaching personnel and student welfare personnel;
- project evaluation.

The processes are led by experts with wide experience in education and educational leadership, collaboration management as well as development work. Valteri's experts are particularly experienced with matters related to student support and pupil welfare.

Support period contents and components

The goal of the support period is to support the student's ability to cope in their neighbourhood school or during their further studies. The support period is implemented in a group setting or as individual periods in Valteri School or at the student's own neighbourhood school. The support period usually lasts for 1 – 3 weeks. An individual report on the support period is made based on multidisciplinary assessments.

Evaluative support period

- evaluating the student's learning potential, learning techniques and need for rehabilitative devices and aids from a pedagogical and rehabilitative perspective;
- school place evaluation period (including students who are applying for admission to Valteri School);
- practising skills related to learning and rehabilitation;
- support for the planning of the implementation of the three category support at the student's neighbourhood school.

Transition phase support period

- supporting the school attendance of students during transitional phases (transitioning from preschool to grades 1 and 2, from grade 2 to grade 3, or from grade 6 to grade 7);

- evaluating the student's learning potential, learning techniques and need for rehabilitative devices and aids from a pedagogical and rehabilitative perspective;
- practising skills;
- in connection with some support periods, an informative training session on transition phases for parents can also be arranged;
- support for the planning of the implementation of three category support at the student's neighbourhood school.

Further education support period

- supporting the further studies of young people and their coping with their further studies; the support period is meant for young people who are at the final stages of their basic education;
- supporting young people from the perspective of student guidance;
- evaluating the student's learning potential, learning techniques and need for rehabilitative devices and aids;
- practising skills;
- receiving an individual report based on multidisciplinary assessments and planning one's further studies;
- in connection with some support periods, an informative training session on the transition phase for parents can also be arranged.

Valteri's in-service training includes:

- methods and operating models for solving everyday learning situations;
- up-to-date professional knowledge for personnel in the education and teaching sector;
- common consideration and solutions for developing flexible and diverse learning support for everyone in a comprehensive school.

Valteri's experts are experienced in providing rehabilitation that supports teaching and learning. They arrange national, regional and school-specific training sessions for professionals and stakeholders in the teaching and education sector. These training sessions can be implemented as individually tailored training events and workshops or as long-term education and development processes.

You can find more information on the [Valteri website](#).

on the following **Services:**

Development companion, like research collaboration and development projects

Professional development, like in-service training, work guidance, learning materials and publications

Successes for the student in everyday life, like rehabilitation, neuropsychiatric coaching, personalised materials, assisted living, morning and afternoon activities and camps.

The joint consultation

A new service was launched in the VIP network: **a joint consultation between four different actors, called Vaatu**. These actors are **Valteri, hospital schools, state owned Reform schools and Elmeri schools**. All these actors have their own specific expertise.

- **Valteri Center for Learning and Consultation** have expertise in neurology, mobility, hearing, language, vision, autism spectrum and multiple needs.

- **Hospital schools** have expertise in psychiatry, somatics, neuropsychiatry, neurology and multiple needs.

- **Elmeri schools** have expertise in intellectual disability, autism spectrum and psychosocial support.

- **State owned Reform schools** have expertise in intensive foster care and special care, placed child in school, mental health problems, criminal and substance abuse problems and multiple needs.

If the pupil's needs persist despite the use of local services and diverse support, it is possible to make use of the counselling service provided jointly by Vaatu actors. The purpose of the joint consultation is to strengthen local pedagogical competence and support, as well as multidisciplinary co-operation, and to find solutions to the child's or young person's particularly challenging situations together with the pupil's local school. The support is intended to help when all local services have already been used.
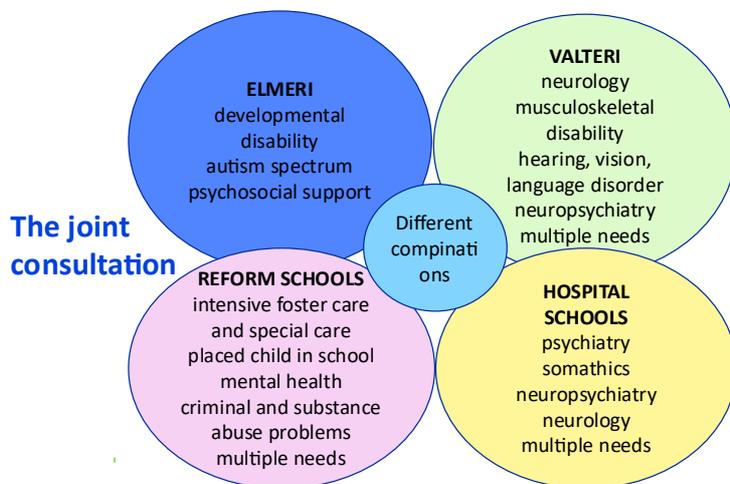
Figure 12. The joint consultation

Often, work community consultation is also needed, as a child with challenging behaviour can easily bring the whole work community's dysfunction to the surface. Many issues can be addressed in schools through structures, resources and capacity building.

Capacity building and research-based approaches are part of the development work. Two long-term training courses have been organised for consultant teachers, as well as

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individual training sessions on different topics. The VAATU research group produces research data on the actors involved in work. The focus is on annual statistics and research on national development work.

Vaatu consultation increases *regional equality*. In small municipalities, the expertise may not exist because there are only single cases of pupils with uncommon special needs in one municipality. Vaatu consultation is now in the pilot phase, with the consultation costing for municipalities only €150 per case.

The Vaatu working group plans and co-ordinates co-operation at national level. The working group is made up of representatives of the four above-mentioned actors and research, as well as the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education.

Common consultation with social and health care

The Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare (OT Centres) are a new service structure under development to provide the most challenging specialised, multidisciplinary and integrated services needed across the country, but which are not operationally or financially feasible for a single county to provide. OT Centres work under the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Five OT Centres are planned, one for each of the co-operative regions in Finland. The activities of the OT centres are focused on the following tasks:

Research and development

Research and development work, specifically targeted at integrated services, and the provision of support to professionals working with children, young people and families in particularly demanding situations. In accordance with the plan, the OT Centres will disseminate and support the introduction of evidence- or research-based care or working methods in the region.

Services

The OT Centres can also provide themselves with services and care for a small group of clients whose care and support require the most specialised skills. However, the starting point for OT-Centre work is networking and co-ordination between specialists from different disciplines.

The development of OT Centres is closely linked to the work of the VIP networks in the education sector (See picture 3). The joint consultation with education, social and health sectors is necessary, for example, in challenging child protection cases, or where there is a significant need for socio-emotional support affecting school attendance. The first pilots have started in a limited number of regions.

Flexible basic education – An innovative way to organise education

Finland has been developing innovative teaching methods and procedures to cater for individual needs. In 2006, the Ministry of Education launched a project Flexible Basic Education (JOPO®) to activate early school leavers. Its purpose was to develop new teaching methods and procedures which help reduce dropout. It developed new methods catering for individual needs which use activity-based learning, small group teaching, on-

the-job learning and different learning environments. JOPO activities support pupils in finishing school and applying for further training in mainstream vocational institutions or general upper secondary schools by means of multi-professional co-operation, early intervention and intensified school-home co-operation.

JOPO activities

The JOPO activities are organised into small groups led by a teacher and another professional. The teachers usually have special education training, and their work partners are generally youth workers, youth instructors or community pedagogues. The foremost forms of activity are individual guidance, on-the-job learning and possibly studies in ordinary teaching groups taught by subject teachers. Other activities include school camps and various excursions in order to develop team and community spirit. Pupils also participate special courses especially tailored for them. In particular, the JOPO groups have developed action-based learning methods which highlight inquiry based and co-operative learning instead of teacher-led learning.

In place of subject-specific learning, JOPO has developed thematic learning and more needs based and situational time use. Different JOPO groups emphasise slightly different things. In some groups, the focus is more on individual learning, while others favour on-the-job learning. The activities of some groups focus on learning derived from the pupils' strengths and interests, which bolsters their self-assurance, self-confidence and future orientation. In all groups, the basic educational task, that is, learning basic life-management skills (time management, working in a group) and social deportment consumed a great deal of time from actual instruction.

The most common reasons for enrolment in a JOPO group are problems with motivation, and low school achievement. The JOPO pupils' family and life situations are more difficult than average, which is manifested as psychosocial problems and insecurity, and the groups include an above-average proportion of children from one-parent families.

The impact analyses of the project

The report of the impact analyses described the implementation of the JOPO project in schools in the school year 2007–2008 and assesses the impact of the project. The impact analysis was based on changes effected in the JOPO pupils' (n = 624) situations in the course of the school year. It also evaluates how the different methods and forms of learning influence pupils' development. Apart from pupil-specific monitoring data, the impact analysis is based on self-evaluations by schools and local education authorities, feedback submitted by pupils and their parents or caregivers on questionnaires, and interviews with stakeholders.

JOPO activities were found effective. The situation of nearly 90% of the pupils had improved from the initial state of affairs. As regards pupils that had not benefitted, the main reason for the failure to get their studies underway even within JOPO was their extremely difficult family and life situations. JOPO had its largest effect in ensuring that pupils got their school-leaving certificates, in reducing absenteeism and in improving study motivation. The pupils' situations were affected most by personal support and guidance. Other effective forms of activity were on-the-job learning, immediate intervention in non-attendance and intensified school-home co-operation. Both the

pupils' and parents' assessments and feedback were mostly positive, and the JOPO project was considered valuable and useful. The report concludes that mainstreaming the new action models into basic education will in turn require the development of structural factors relating to the action culture and subject centeredness of school.

JOPO became statutory

Following a project and an impact analyses JOPO activities have been adopted on a permanent basis and have been written into the Basic Education Act and the Government Decree in 2009. The legislation regulates the objectives and content of flexible basic education and the admission of pupils to flexible basic education. The additions concerning the organisation of JOPO studies were made to the National Core Curriculum when it was revised for three-tiered support in 2010. In addition, the funding of activities for education providers was provided based on the number of pupils in JOPO studies.

Under the Basic Education Act, a local authority may provide activities within flexible basic education in conjunction with grades 7-9. The education is provided in compliance with the statutes applicable to basic education and the National Core Curriculum.

According to the National Core Curriculum the flexible basic education is provided to reduce the incidence of dropping out of basic education and to prevent exclusion. Its goal is to strengthen the pupils' motivation to study and life management. In addition to completing the basic education syllabus, the pupils are supported in their transition to the following stage of education and training, and their capabilities for studying successfully are developed.

Flexible basic education is intended for those pupils in grades 7–9 who show signs of underachievement and a weak study motivation, and pupils who are assessed to be at risk of exclusion from further studies and working life.

Co-operation between professional groups and various branches of administration and organisations is highlighted in the instruction. Vocational institutions and general upper secondary schools, liberal adult education institutions and workshops for young people may also be parties to this co-operation.

The school's operating and teaching methods are developed to meet the individual needs of pupils admitted to flexible basic education. Particular attention is paid to work forms that increase the pupils' participation and affinity with the school community and support the joint educational work of guardians and all those working with flexible basic education. Functional and work-oriented methods of study are emphasised in the instruction.

Flexible basic education is organised in small teaching groups in schools, workplaces and other learning environments relying on cross-sectoral co-operation and support and advisory services. JOPO is not a special needs class although the pupils often have many kinds of challenges both at school and at home. In addition to the teacher, a professional appointed by the education provider who has special competence in supporting young people's social growth, co-operation with families and other support and advisory work takes part in the activities. If necessary, the instruction may also partly be provided in connection with another teaching group.

The instruction is provided as contact instruction in schools and as supervised study in workplaces and other learning environments. Studying outside the school is an essential part of flexible basic education. During these periods, the pupils have a right to guidance and instruction provided by a teacher. The pupils are given learning assignments specified in the curriculum. Managing the learning assignments is taken into account in the pupil's assessment. The staff working with the pupils in the workplaces and other learning environments must be familiarised with statutes on occupational safety, data protection, secrecy and other requisite areas.

The pupils are admitted to flexible basic education on application by themselves or their guardians. An administrative decision, which is prepared in a cross-sectoral process, is made on a pupil admission.

A pupil in flexible basic education has a right to the support for learning and school attendance, guidance and pupil welfare referred to in the statutes. A learning plan is drawn up for a pupil in flexible basic education, or a learning plan prepared for them earlier is revised. The plan is drawn up in co-operation with the pupil and their guardian.

Norway – Support systems, structures and tools

Education must be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual pupil, apprentice, candidate for certificate of practice and training candidate.

In grades 1 to 4, the school must ensure that pupils who are at risk of lagging behind in reading, writing or mathematics, quickly are given suitable intensive instruction so that they achieve the expected progress. If it is in the pupil's best interest, the intensive instruction may be given on a one-to-one basis for a short period.

Before the municipality or the county authority takes a decision concerning special education pursuant to section 5-1, an expert assessment must be made of the pupil's specific needs. This assessment must determine whether the pupil needs special education, and what kind of instruction should be provided. The expert assessment must also consider the pupil's learning outcome from the ordinary educational provision and whether it is possible to provide help for the pupil's difficulties within the ordinary educational provision.

Each municipality and county authority must provide an educational and psychological counselling service (PPT). The service must assist the school in work on competence enhancement and organisational development in order to improve the adaptation of the education for pupils with special needs. The educational and psychological counselling service must ensure that expert assessments are prepared where this is required by the Act.

Resources to support inclusion from Statped and the Directorate

Both Directorate for Education and Training (Udir) and Statped have a lot of online tools available. Statped may also support local level directly.

All text on Statped's website (statped.no) can be translated into a variety of languages, following this guideline.

Here is an overview of some important tools available, to support competence development and inclusive practices.

[Competence enhancement/development in special needs education and inclusive practice](#)

The competence enhancement for special needs education and inclusive practice was initiated in the autumn of 2020 and is a follow-up to Meld. St. 6 (2019–2020)): Early intervention and inclusive communities in kindergarten, school and SFO. The goal is to build competence, both in the educational and psychological counselling service (PPT), among employees in kindergartens and schools and in the entire support system in the team around the children and students, so that everyone, regardless of prerequisites, will have the opportunity for development, coping, learning and well-being.

The main part of the competence enhancement is grants for local competence development based on local needs. Competence development shall take place in partnership with a university or university college. In 2021, partnerships were established between municipalities and universities or university colleges in all counties. More than 200 municipalities participate in the partnerships, either alone or in networks with other municipalities. The partnerships include both public and private owners, and it is a prerequisite that the pedagogical and psychological service (PPT) is included in the work.

In order to inform about the competence enhancement and motivate to participate, ten regional digital conferences were arranged in all the counties in the spring of 2021, as a collaboration between the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), Statped and the county governors. In the autumn of 2021, a digital start-up meeting was held for everyone who received an award through Kompetanseløftet (Competence rise).

In addition, the competence enhancement for special needs education and inclusive practice aims to ensure that everyone has sufficient competence to be able to identify and provide inclusive and adapted educational services to everyone, including children and students who need special adaptations.

Pleas also see the online tool [RefLex](#), to help kindergartens, schools and municipalities assess whether their practice complies with the regulations in selected topics. Themes included in the tool are: [Report need for special education](#) / [School-based assessment](#) / [School environment](#) / [The school's work with the pupils' learning outcomes](#) / [Special education: Plan, implement and follow up special education](#).

Reflection tools for inclusive practice in kindergartens and schools

Statped has developed two [reflection tools](#) for inclusive practice, one for schools and one for kindergartens. The tools map the inclusive practices of schools/kindergartens by having staff complete a digital claim form.

The reflection tool '[Inclusive Practice](#)' is a counselling tool that the PPT and Statped can use in their system-oriented work to promote an inclusive learning environment in kindergartens and schools. Inclusive practice was previously referred to as an analytical tool. The purpose is to help ensure that children and young people receive satisfactory education in an inclusive learning environment and experience themselves as participants in the community, strengthen co-operation between the educational and psychological

counselling service and kindergartens/schools, provide knowledge about the kindergarten/school's point of view in the work with an inclusive learning environment and help support the kindergarten/school's change work towards a more inclusive practice, implement guidelines on inclusive learning environments in curricula and legislation.

A competence package where the goal is to promote inclusion with the support of technology Statped has also developed tools on [digital didactics and inclusion](#).

Digital didactics and inclusion are created with the goal that everyone should participate actively in the learning community. In addition to creating an inclusive learning environment, it is a goal that the competence measure will contribute to closer co-operation between the kindergarten or school and the educational and psychological counselling service.

Modules for kindergartens, completed spring 2022:

1. Introduction
2. Number, space, shape and technology.
3. Communication, Language, Text and Technology
4. Social competence and technology.

Modules for schools:

1. Inclusive use of technology, professional digital competence, digital didactic design, classroom management in the digital classroom, the Good Hour, accessibility features and universal design.
2. Social competence and technology, digital common sense, relational competence and social skills, digital games in collaborative learning, digital tools, and social competence.
3. Reading and writing and technology, good learning strategies, complex digital texts, digital study technic, dissemination through audio, image, and video, writing frames and thinking writing.
4. Numeracy and technology, digital learning resources and mathematics mastery, numeracy, and various special educational needs, flipped classroom, rich tasks.
5. Innovative use of technology, games as inclusive learning activity, literature and text creation through games, programming in teaching, virtual reality/augmented reality in education.

*Multilingual resources – [**morsmal.no**](#)*

National Center for Multicultural Education (NAFO) has as one of its responsibilities to support kindergartens and school with material in many languages. The material covers these disciplines: Words and concepts / Plays & Games / Books and stories / Poems, song and music / Multilingual posters / Native languages / Mathematics / Science / Social sciences / Religion.

The project is funded by the European Union through the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, in co-operation with the European Commission

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Other topics include parental co-operation such as: Information about kindergarten and school / Parent meetings and conversations / Information material / Multilingual posters.

All this is in these languages: Norwegian, Afrikaans, Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian, Burmese, Danish, Dari, Dinka, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Ilonggo, Indonesian, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Karen, Khmer, Korean, Kurmanji, Lithuanian, Sami, Macedonian. Malay, Mandarin, Mauritian Creole, Dutch, Nepali, Pashto, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Samoan, Serbian, Sinhalese, Somali, Sorani, Spanish, Swedish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Tigrinya, Turkish, German, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Urdu, Uzbek.

So this may also be of interest to Portugal, Italy and Spain. Visit motsmal.no -> Velg språk (choose language) and/or Velg ressurs (choose resource).

Sweden – Toward a systemic view on specialist functions and turnarounds

Specialist, support functions: complements or concurring ideas and paths?

Problem and aim: how to support teachers and pupils in an efficient way by specialist, support functions?

Key features and results 1990-2023 (Hjörne and Säljö, 2008; Hylander and Guvå, 2017; Hylander and Skott, 2020; Löfberg, 2018; Skott 2023):

> A.   From Special support, to support to the classroom and the schools promotion of wellbeing and learning

Up to 1991: special teacher, groups and assistance in focus. From 1991 formal education of 'special pedagogue' (as a mean for transforming from 'special' to raise the capacity in 'mainstream'. It was however, build on an underestimation of the complexity since one new function was assumed to 'change' the system. The local authorities and principals was not prepared to take care of, lead and organise the new competence.

A new function was defined in the law of 2010: 'The pupil health'- four professions (nurse, social worker, special pedagogue, psychologist). The label 'The Pupil Health' did create a **specialist trap**: 'take care of those in need of special support'.

A learning of importance came in 2015: a move from a special support team aside, to the 'work process' together with teachers to promote capacity for more inclusive schools and classrooms, led by the principal.

The learning thereafter is about the necessity to *lead, organise and synchronise work* for wellbeing and learning by principals supported by local authorities and their head of schools.

> B.   Renewed priority of and stronger financing for 'special teachers' in connection to perceived needs both in classrooms and by the 2022 decided form of Resource schools.

Challenges ahead and transferable learning**:** How to handle short term acting in the political system with a continuous tendency of 'counter-acting', when there is a need for continuity of improvements?

The importance of how to organise and synchronise special support functions in order to develop the fundamental everyday activities of teaching and learning

Interconnected to these results, a growing field of development and research in Sweden emerged about Pupil Health in schools. Since the School law of 2010, the pupil health system is highlighted. How shall support functions such as the special pedagogue, the psychologist, the social curator and the medical profession be organised and work in order to promote health and learning and prevent risks of illness and low achievement? (Hjörne and Säljö, 2008; Hylander and Guvå, 2017; Hylander and Skott, 2020; Löfberg, 2018). The same growing interest in support functions is shown in recent quantitative and qualitative studies in Iceland. They focus on mandatory municipal schools' support system. The results indicate high emphasis on clinical approach, diagnosing pupils' weaknesses, trying to find a way to adapt pupils to the school system, and less on consultation of schools, teachers and principals. There were few initiatives from the support system on supporting leadership, professional development and learning communities (Svanbjörnsdóttir et al., 2020).

The overall tendency in this process of knowledge building is *toward a more systemic perspective on pupil health* within a local education system. From viewing it as a separate 'thing' as a team of support functions focused mainly on special support by Action Provision Plans, to highlighting the necessity of using the competence in order to strengthen the learning environment at large. In one study in Sweden, Hylander and Skott (2020) followed principals and Pupil Health Teams (PHT) from 19 schools after their participation in a development-oriented course by the National Agency (SPSM) '*To raise the schools' pupil health competence – a process work for an equitable education.*'

The course gave helpful support for the development of health promoting and preventive work with pupils´ health. The study was grounded on two theoretical models: one for co-ordination of the schools' work with pupil health, and another for development of inter-professional Pupil Health Teams (4–5 specialist professions led by the principal). The study clarifies the importance of: *co-ordination* of all parts in the local school system, *analysis* of the local context and its complexity, *synchronisation* of the leadership by the principal, *development of the PHT*s, *co-operation* between PHTs, teachers and other professionals in school and *responsibilities and participation of the local authorities* in the development process.

In the latest study Skott (2023) did focus on the local authority's role and functioning in several municipalities and Skott even pinpointed the importance of local authorities, especially the Head of schools, to recognise the difference between different schools and principals concerning the ability to co-ordinate and synchronise, and from that give support in order to build capacity by each principal and the schools PHT in their ability to support also differences between classrooms.

National special pedagogic support can be of vital importance when it connects not just to singular cases, but to local pupil health teams, principals and local authorities

As shown in the report from Finland, and mentioned above, we did indicate positive results, when the national agency for special pedagogic support (SPSM) meets the need of local level by giving support to the local level (both Heads of schools and principals) on how to organise and synchronise the Pupils health teams (PHT) to give development

support to teacher in order to strengthen the everyday inclusive capability in the schools. The success factors seem to be that the national actors support not just a singular professional group, as individuals, but rather support the local context at 'all' levels. Then there will be not just individual competence development, but also on-going development of the 'enterprise' as a whole, the school and also the local community of schools (Löfberg, 2018; Hylander and Skott, 2020; Skott, 2023).

Nordic network findings

The Nordic project firstly focused on the organising and utilisation of special functions and found that *it is not only about gathering all professional capacity; it is also about creating and integrating local support to each school*.

- It is often a tension between the placement of special support functions at each school or centralised to the local authority. The tension is somewhat misleading, rather it is successful to combine the qualities of each: what is important to have at school level and what is important to have at authority level (in order to distribute based on needs). Each school is where it is and therefore, it is a need for central support functions that can handle the diversity of ability in schools.

- A distinct focus for all support functions is vital: how to support the core activity (teaching and learning) to evolve toward greater inclusive capability and pupil achievement?

Improvement of inclusive capability at school level and in classrooms

Finland – Strategies and developments towards inclusive education

Nearly fifty years ago Finland moved from the parallel, selective education system to the comprehensive, totally non-selective system in basic education (primary and lower secondary education). The transition to the basic education was carried out gradually throughout the country, starting in the north, between 1972 and 1977.

Support for learning and school attendance, and inclusive education started to be developed more systematically in the 21st century. The reforms can be interpreted roughly as being either evolutionary or revolutionary. The first refers to development proceeding more as a continuum of different stages, while a latter means a radical transition, which creates new rules and institutions (Sahlberg 2011). The Finnish Education policy belong to the first category. The development work is always built on the best experiences and what has been done before.

The Finnish education policy operates in general according to *long-term visions and consensus*, something that has been shown in the special needs and inclusive education reforms and the *nation-wide monitoring and evaluation* of the effects. The results of the evaluations have been used in further development work. These actions have continued from one government's term of office to another.

The special education strategy (SPES) 2007

The special education strategy (SPES) white paper was launched in 2007 (Opetusmnisteriö, 2007 Reports of the Ministry of Education), the related changes in the Basic Education Act came into force in 2011 at the same time with the Amendments and Additions in National Curricula for Pre-primary and Basic Education. In 2008–2009 the State invited local municipalities to participate in advance preparations for the reforms. This wide *development programme* to support the implementation was implemented 2008 – 2012. It included extensive *in-service training* and *support for local development*. This is different from many other countries because support for local development started before the law was amended. Finland's extensive pedagogical autonomy made this possible, as new pedagogical methods could be implemented immediately.

The development work has always been *evidence-based*, built on research. The achievement of the objectives and the impact of the development have been systematically evaluated both during and after the development process. This work was already supported by action research through the process, carried out by the University of Helsinki (2008 – 2012). Several studies have been carried out since the development period by different universities:

- Report on the implementation of three-tier support 2014.
- Educational support from early childhood to the transition to upper secondary education: actualisation of equity and needs for development. Publications of the Government´s analysis, assessment and research activities 55/2018

Key issues in implementing the reform were:

- good project funding - earmarked development funding for municipalities;
- the goal was to enhance teachers' professionalism - in-service education for teachers and school leaders;
- nationally organised process with local networks, peer learning, benchmarking;
- supporting materials for teachers;
- good learning materials for pupils;
- supporting differentiation.

The content of the three-tiered support in described in more detail in next Chapters.
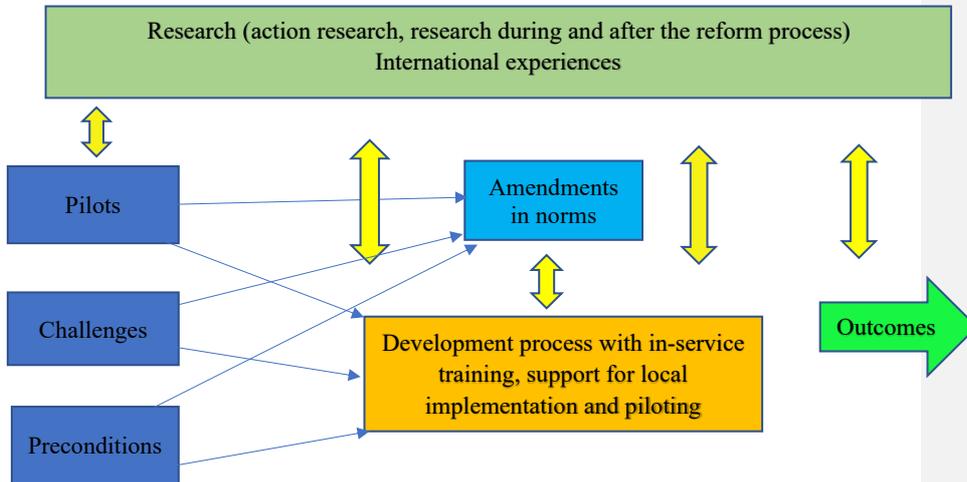
Figure 13. Developing education in Finland

Content of the reform

Levels of support

The three-tiered support model was first implemented in 2011. Instead of the former emphasis on psychology and medicine, the new model takes a pedagogical approach, stresses multi-professional work, and recommends early intervention with more student welfare groups functioning preventatively. The model introduced new pedagogical assessment tools and individual learning plans. In order to meet these demands, teachers are expected to find effective ways to collaborate, use flexible student groupings, and differentiate teaching in innovative ways.

The support must be flexible so that it changes according to the needed support. It must also be based on long-term planning. Finnish educational legislation does not categories pupils according to disabilities or support needs. When planning the level of support (general, intensified or special) for a pupil, the support needs are assessed. The need may vary from temporary to continuous, from minor to major, or from one to several forms of support.

To ensure the early identification of needs for support, the progress of the pupils in learning and the state of their school attendance must be continuously assessed. The school's operating methods, teaching arrangements and learning environments as well as their suitability for the pupil are examined first. On the basis of this examination, it is assessed whether it is possible to implement more suitable pedagogical solutions by making changes in these aspects. In the examination and planning of the support, the results of any other assessments are utilised, and any support provided for the pupil earlier is taken into account.

General support

General support is the first response to a pupil's need for support. Usually this means individual pedagogical solutions, guidance, and support measures which seek to improve the situation in an early stage as a part of daily school life. **General support is provided as soon as a need arises, and no specific evaluations or decisions are required**.

To provide general support, **all the support forms of basic education may be used**, excluding the individualisation of syllabi for subjects. The pupil's needs for support are met, for example by means of **remedial teaching, part-time special needs education or guidance**.

A **learning plan** may be used **as part of general support** if necessary. In this case, where applicable, the learning plan contains the same areas as a learning plan prepared for intensified support. The studies of a more advanced pupil may be deepened and broadened by means of a learning plan.

Intensified support

A pupil who needs regular support in learning or school attendance or several support forms simultaneously is provided with **intensified support on the basis of a pedagogical assessment** in accordance with a learning plan devised for him or her. A pupil may need support in school attendance to participate in teaching. The support can be, for example, support for behaviour or well-being. It may be interpretation or assistance services or special aids that the pupil needs. The **quality and quantity** of the intensified support is adjusted to the pupil's **individual needs**. Intensified support is provided when general support is not enough, and it is continued for as long as the pupil needs it. A pupil's intensified support is **planned as a coherent whole**. It is more substantial than general support and provided over a longer period of time. Usually the pupil also needs several support forms. **Intensified support is provided as part of mainstream education using flexible teaching arrangements**.

During intensified support, all support forms of basic education can be used. Part time special needs education, individual guidance, and co-operation between home and school, for instance, are especially significant during intensified support. The role of pupil welfare in promoting and maintaining the pupil's well-being should also be strengthened.

Measures taken while the pupil receives intensified support **are recorded in a learning plan.** During intensified support, the learning and school attendance of the pupil must be **regularly monitored and assessed**. Provided that the assessment indicates a change in the need for support, or the pupil does not benefit from the support provided, the learning plan is updated to respond to the new situation.

Special support

Special support is provided to pupils who otherwise cannot adequately achieve the goals set for their growth, development or learning. The purpose of special support is to provide the pupil with holistic and methodical support that allows him or her to complete compulsory education and lay a foundation for continuing studies after basic education. Special support consists of special needs education and other support needed by the pupil.

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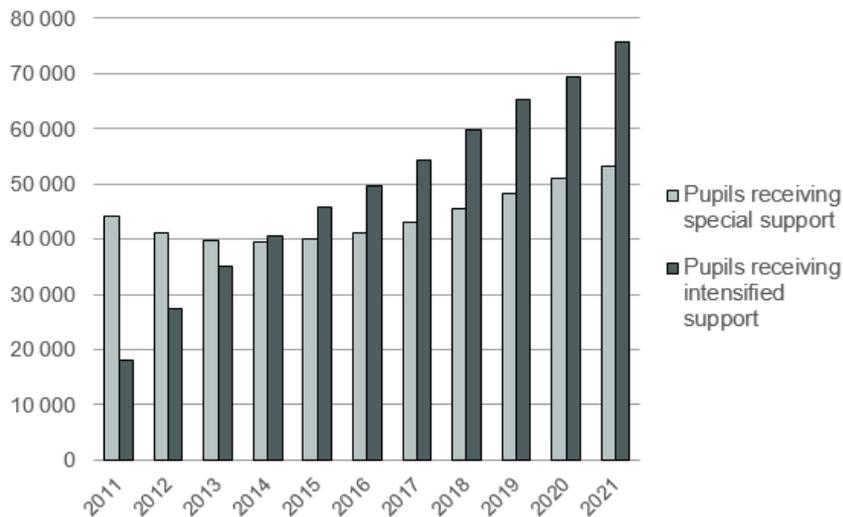
Figure 14. The number of pupils receiving intensified and special support in 2011–2021

Special support is provided within the scope of either general or extended compulsory education. The studies of a pupil receiving special support are arranged either by subjects or by activity areas. If the pupil's studies are arranged by subjects, he or she studies these subjects according to either the general syllabus or an individualised syllabus.

If a decision on special support has been issued to a pupil, special needs education is provided to him or her following an individual educational plan. The primary goal of the pedagogical solutions that are part of special needs education is to guarantee the pupil's learning. The pedagogical solutions may be relevant to the instruction and working methods or the materials and tools selected. These depend on the learning objectives and contents and the pupil's personal needs.

In addition to pedagogical solutions of special needs education that support learning, a pupil receiving special support is entitled to other forms of support. These include guidance, individual pupil welfare, interpretation and assistance services and special aids.

More data: Special and intensified support (vipunen.fi) The reports arranged by time series, region and form of support provide data on pupils receiving intensified or special support, while the reports on the teaching groups and personalisation of teaching include only pupils receiving special support.

Form of support (Individual pupils may receive more than one form of support.)
Personalisation of teaching
Region
Teaching group
Time series

Forms of support - Specific Support Measures

According to the National Core Curriculum (Finnish National Board of Education 2016:5) each pupil is provided with support at his or her own school through various flexible arrangements, unless its provision inevitably requires the pupil to be transferred to another teaching group or school. The place of provision is decided as part of the special support decision based on the assessment of the needs of the individual pupil.

The most commonly used support measures are:

- remedial instruction (all levels of support);
- part-time special-needs education (all levels of support);
- assistant and interpretation services, special aids (all levels of support, mainly intensified and special support).

Pupils and their parents must be provided with information about support measures and be given an opportunity to express their views on the provision of support. The school management is responsible for decisions relating to the provision and implementation of support and for taking these into account in all year groups and subjects. Individualisation of a syllabus requires a decision on special support.

Remedial instruction prevents pupils from falling behind

A pupil who has temporarily fallen behind in studies or otherwise needs short-term support in learning is entitled to remedial instruction. Remedial instruction must be given as soon as learning difficulties are observed to prevent the pupil from permanently falling behind. Remedial instruction may be provided at all levels of support.

Remedial instruction may be provided as team teaching in the pupil's regular teaching group, in a small group, or completely individually. It is also possible to make use of various flexible group arrangements to implement remedial teaching during lessons.

Part-time special needs education supports learning and school attendance

A pupil who has difficulties in learning or school attendance is entitled to special needs education alongside other instruction. Part-time special needs education is provided for pupils with problems relating to linguistic or mathematical skills, learning difficulties in individual subjects, study or social skills or in their school attendance.

Part-time special needs education is provided through flexible arrangements as team teaching, in a small group or individually. It is planned and pupils' learning is assessed in co-operation between teachers. Part-time special needs education may be provided at all levels of support.

Enhanced multi-disciplinary support

The Ministry of Education and Culture evaluated the implementation of the three-tiered support in its report submitted to the Education and Culture Committee in 2014 (Ministry of Education and Culture Publications 2014:2). The report found that the focus of the activities has shifted from corrective to preventive measures. In the development proposals of the report, attention was paid to mapping the situation of pupils at risk of not

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graduating, pupils being excluded from basic education and those who need multi-professional, intensive support.

The second strategic work of the 21st century began 2015, when the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a working group to make proposals for the development of so called enhanced multidisciplinary support. The group's task was to develop the teaching of pupils whose support needs are usually long-term, intensive and multidisciplinary. The group proposed that hospital teaching units, Elmeri schools, state reform schools, municipal special needs schools, the Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting, as well as university and other units for research and education in the field of special education will establish regional co-operation networks that will be named VIP networks. The national network will consist of five collaborative catchment areas that are consistent with the future catchment areas defined in the healthcare and social welfare reform. These networks will be further developed into guidance and service networks for enhanced multidisciplinary support.

The development group also presented development proposals relating to information management, the need to amend legislation, changes in the culture of the organisation and development of multidisciplinary co-operation. The aim was to ensure the right of every pupil to receive education every school day in pre-primary and primary education whenever possible, taking into account the pupil's state of health.

VIP-network

The strategy led to the creation of the VIP network. The VIP network operated at national level and regionally in five co-operation areas. Regional work was developed through multidisciplinary co-operation in regional groups. The first development period was 2018-2020, with a second 'consolidation' period in 2021-2022.

The objectives set for the VIP network remained the same as in the first period. While the development of multidisciplinary co-operation, culture change and competence building remained important, new priorities were also selected, and new activities were launched based on the development needs identified in the 2020 survey evaluation. Co-operation with research and teacher education was strengthened in the second period, early childhood education was more closely involved in the development and co-operation with education providers was increased.

Interaction with education providers was increased by inviting municipalities, private education providers and university training schools to nominate two persons as VIPU liaison officers. At the same time, co-operation between the education provider and student welfare services was strengthened, with one of these liaisons representing educational support and the other representing student welfare services. In order to develop multidisciplinary support for early childhood education in particular, early childhood education actors were also invited to participate in the various groups of the VIP network.

As in the first period, thematic support was developed, and materials and training were produced in thematic groups on different topics. Some of the thematic groups were new and others continued the work started in the first period. Vaatu actors (See chapter 9.4) continued their own co-operation both at regional and national level and together developed and piloted a new type of joint multidisciplinary consultation service to support

the organisation of pre-primary and primary and lower secondary education in particularly challenging situations.

Figure 15. The structure of VIP-network

The actors of the VIP network jointly produced text and development ideas on themes related to the network's development activities also for the Ministry of Education and Culture's working group on the Right to Learn - Promoting learning support, child support and inclusion in early childhood education and care, pre-primary and primary education for its final report and in particular for the development proposals for enhanced multidisciplinary support raised in it.

Finnish Government Programme 2020–2022 – Right to Learn (RtL) Programme

Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture was advancing a number of policies, notably under the umbrella of the Right to Learn (RtL) Programme. Following Finland's traditional commitment to universalism, social rights and equality, these programmes seek to ensure an equal start for children by improving quality and equality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and basic education.

The aim of the Right to Learn Programme *was to prepare new measures to ensure inclusive basic education.* The Ministry of Education and Culture implemented the programmes between 2020 and 2022. The Right to Learn incorporated legislative and financial changes and promoted practices and methods that strengthen equality.

The RtL Programme was made up of two distinct streams:

- **The Development Programme for Quality and Equality in Early Childhood Education and Care**

- **The Development Programme for Quality and Equality in Comprehensive School Education**

The objective was to examine the principle of inclusion contained in legislation and the allocated resources. Some of the concrete aims:

- Three-tier support in basic education will be strengthened.

- The guidance and service networks development will be continued by consolidating the existing **VIP network** structure and supporting teachers' professional development and wellbeing at work, as well as developing multi-professional operating models for schools.

The Right to Learn programme comprised projects for the development of the quality and equality of early childhood education and care and basic education. A total of 180 million euros was allocated over a period of three years to the quality and equality programme for basic education, and 125 million euros was allocated to the quality and equality programme for early childhood education and care.

Development Programme for Quality and Equality in Early Childhood Education and Care

Not only does ECEC lay the foundation for children's future learning; it also levels out differences in learning that stem from their family backgrounds. The objective of the programme was to create equal conditions for learning, offering greater flexibility for those that start, and improve the quality of ECEC. This includes plans to improve the staff-to-children ratio for children above 3 and strengthen professional development programme for ECEC management teams. The programme was aimed to find ways for more children to participate in ECEC.

The objective was to implement measures to support non-discrimination. The learning and welfare of children was promoted, and investments were made in the prevention of bullying. At the same time, support for children's language learning was strengthened.

A two-year pre-primary education pilot started as part of the project. This is a way of gathering experience on making pre-primary education compulsory from the age of 5. An effort was be made to improve the early learning of basic skills by integrating pre-primary education and the first two years of primary school into a more cohesive entity. In addition, the ministry prepared a national in-service training programme for the management of early childhood education and care.

Right to Learn goals for ECEC:

1. We will create equal conditions for learning paths,

2. We will promote learning support,

3. We will create a more flexible start for learning, and

4. We will improve the quality of ECEC.

Development Programme for Quality and Equality in Comprehensive School Education

Basic education guarantees everyone equal opportunities to learn the skills they need in life. The objective of the programme was to improve learning outcomes and equality in primary and secondary education, make better support available for children and strengthen the quality of teaching. It aimed to narrow and prevent learning gaps that are due to the socioeconomic background, immigrant background or gender of pupils. The

project included the predation of a model for establishing central government transfers for equality as a standard part of basic education funding. In addition, support for learning and school attendance as well as literacy was strengthened. The Ministry worked to prevent the trend towards increasing regional inequality. Prospective measures include developing a national inclusion development programme, and reinforcing teachers' continuous professional learning.

The Right to Learn programme aimed to identify effective measures to reduce group sizes. The project supported the local school principle. The quality of teaching will be improved with such measures as the provision of in-service training to teachers, management and other staff and implementing a national management development programme.

Right to Learn goals for comprehensive school education:

1. We will strengthen learning outcomes and equality in education,

2. We will make available better support for children, and

3. We will strengthen the quality of teaching.

Working group to promote educational equality and positive discrimination in early childhood education and care, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary – The third strategy work

Working group to promote educational equality and positive discrimination in early childhood education and care, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary under the 'Right to learn' development programme was appointed in 2020 and the report was published in November 2022.

According to the working group, the concept and implementation of inclusion should be clarified in early childhood education and care and in pre-primary and basic education. In line with the principle of inclusion, learning support is primarily implemented in such a way that every child and young person receives adequate and timely support in their own local environment. This requires adequate resources to be allocated to support. The working group proposes to further investigate how inclusive early childhood care and education is implemented in municipalities in accordance with current legislation.

The early identification of support needs and preventive pedagogical practices in early childhood education and care, pre-primary and basic education should be strengthened. It is important that development measures are targeted at the implementation of general support and the differentiation. The development of multidisciplinary support and co-operation for complex support needs must also be continued in the long term. The leadership of support and inclusion needs to be strengthened.

Attention must be paid to the identification, documentation and implementation of support measures for children under three years of age. The developmental and pedagogical needs of children under three years of age must be taken into account in the early childhood education and care curricula as well as in initial and in-service training of staff. Statistics and data production on early childhood education and care will be developed.

The development proposals also include clarifying the overall support for pre-primary and basic education in the Basic Education Act and in the curriculum. The working group has identified and comprehensively highlighted the need for changes in the current regulation of pre-primary and basic education.

Towards inclusive education

The working group examined the issue of inclusion extensively and made the following proposals for its development:

We will clarify the concept and implementation of inclusion in early childhood education and care, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education

- we will examine how inclusive ECEC and teaching that complies with current legislation is realised in municipalities, in early childhood education and care and in schools;

- to strengthen inclusive practices, we will draw up and implement a national implementation plan for early childhood education and care, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education; it will define inclusion and inclusive practices when providing support;

- we will support early childhood education and care providers and education providers to implement inclusive provision of support at the local level for children and pupils who need it.

We will bring inclusion for pre-primary and primary and lower secondary education more strongly into legislation

- we will specify the principle of inclusiveness in section 3 of the Basic Education Act as the foundation for the provision of education;

- we will assess the provisions of the Basic Education Act from the perspective of the obligations governed by the rights of children enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The development proposals contained in the final report of the working group are intended as a basis for the preparation of the next government programme when future development guidelines for early childhood education and care and basic education are drawn up.

Challenges:

The Basic Education Act does not make inclusive education obligatory. Municipalities are free to define the education of special needs pupils.

Often, the decision to transfer a pupil to a special needs class is based on school resources, not the student's needs.

Norway

All students, regardless of qualifications, have the right to be included in the community. The Education Act states: ''In the teaching and training, the pupils shall be divided into classes or basic groups that will safeguard their need for social belonging. For parts of the training, students can be divided into other groups as needed. Normally, the organisation

shall not take place according to professional level, gender or ethnicity'' (Section 8-2 of the Education Act). This also applies to students receiving special education.

A more inclusive service in kindergartens and schools – project on inclusion

Interdisciplinary collaboration on early intervention for inclusion in kindergartens and schools can speed up the support and ensure that challenges are solved at a lower level. This is shown in this follow-up evaluation of projects in five municipalities.

This is the final report from I2E''s follow-up evaluation of five municipalities'' development work for and with inclusion and early intervention in kindergartens and schools in the period 2019–-2022. The report contributes with new and practice-oriented knowledge about how education and support services in kindergartens, schools and after-school care (SFO) can be improved, so that it is well adapted and inclusive for all children and students.

The pilots, and the accompanying research project, were proposed as measures in White paper 6 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019), to increase the knowledge base regarding how to develop more inclusive programmes for all children and pupils. Municipalities were invited to apply for funding to test measures that can lead to more inclusive and adapted programmes. Funding was awarded to five municipalities earmarked for a pilot co-ordinator for the project period (2020–2022).

The objective of the formative research process has been to identify and highlight methods, experiences, promising practices, and challenges.

The pilot call allowed for the testing of a variety of approaches to inclusive practices. As a result, the projects that were awarded funding are different. The testing of alternative practices conducted in the five municipalities has centred around three main themes:

1. Shifting the role of the educational and psychological counselling service towards early identification and intervention.
2. Creating more inclusive and adapted programmes in early childhood education and care and in schools.
3. Improving interprofessional collaboration on inclusion and early identification and intervention.

All the pilot projects have focused on more than one theme, and it varies which theme they have emphasised. Shifting the role of the educational and psychological counselling service towards early identification and intervention has been a part of all the pilot projects. How to create more inclusive and adapted programmes has also been an element in all the projects.

Challenging, pioneering work

An overall observation after following pilots for two years, is that considerable pioneering work has taken place in the five pilot projects. Their work has generated new and practice-oriented knowledge about how to create more inclusive practices in early childhood education and care and in schools.

A change towards more inclusive practices involves comprehensive changes in values and mindset for the involved professions. Anchoring processes at all levels of leadership, and

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among the staff, is crucial to succeed. Co-production and organisational learning are approaches that the pilot projects have positive experiences with.

They have looked into barriers and how they have been navigated. However, some of the barriers cannot be circumvented. The only way is through. That particularly holds for the work involved in changing the values and mindset of all the professions working closely with the children and pupils.

Shifting the role of the educational and psychological counselling service

The pilot projects have positive experiences with the increased presence of the educational and psychological counselling service in early childhood education and care and in schools. Their presence has contributed to changing the educators'' view on the service and lowered the threshold for contacting them. A shared experience from the pilot projects is that children's needs are identified and followed up earlier than before, and that many of them can be solved at a lower level than before.

At the same time, the piloting has demonstrated some dilemmas and challenges that emerge when the educational and psychological counselling service shifts its role towards more early identification and intervention work. Concerning the workload of the counsellors and the documentation requirements.

More inclusive and adapted programmes

The pilot projects have tested several promising approaches to develop more inclusive and adapted programmes in early childhood education and care and in schools. All the projects have worked on developing a shared understanding of what inclusion means. As a result of shared reflection on what constitutes inclusive practices, several projects have developed their own criteria for inclusive practices; it has led to increased awareness among the educators of modelling inclusive behaviours, and more educators now use adaptions that benefit the whole group. Some of the projects have focused their efforts on further developing a professional adult role that is tuned in to a diverse group of children, and that helps them regulate their own feelings. Practicing these approaches and working on actual skills have been an important part of the pilot work in several projects.

Improving interprofessional collaboration on inclusion and early identification and intervention

The pilot projects have focused on somewhat different aspects of interprofessional collaboration; some on organisational factors, some on relational and some on procedural factors. Several projects have given attention to improving relational factors, which seems to have produced positive results by contributing to a more shared understanding and practice surrounding inclusion of children. Several projects report uncertainty regarding whose responsibility it is to follow up on a case when working with early identification and intervention in an interprofessional setting. Ensuring a clear division of responsibilities therefore appears particularly important. Among useful organisational approaches, we want to point to clear placement of leadership responsibility for the interprofessional collaboration.

Movements in the understanding of inclusion

The pilot projects, and the accompanying process facilitation, have contributed to changes in the understanding of the concept of inclusion. The process facilitation has demonstrated that, in addition to cognitive and social dimensions, affective dimensions are also crucial to reflect on and critically question yourself and your own practice.

By increasing the presence of the educational and psychological counselling service in kindergartens and schools, pilot municipalities find that early and preventive work has been strengthened, and thus also inclusion. Several of the participants have experienced how important it is to develop a common understanding of what inclusion means in order to bring about a change in the desired direction. Experiences related to children's participation and general use of special educational resources in the student group are other important learning points from the pilot project.

Country policy review Norway – European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

In 2016, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education led a Country policy review and analysis of Norway on financing policies for inclusive education systems. In the project, a number of municipalities presented their work on inclusion. Here are some inputs from two municipalities involved.

In the municipality of Flekkefjord in 2012, the situation nearly up to 17,2 per cent of the pupils received special needs education. About 20 million of 84 million NKR were used to this part of the education. 35 per cent of the special needs education was given in the ordinary classroom, the rest is in groups or alone. They concluded that the pupils were taken away from the social interaction and training with the other pupils, the special needs education did not meet the goals set, and it was a tendency of keeping the learners in segregated settings. The learners were unhappy. A lot of money was brought out of the classrooms for an activity that didn't help.

They introduced a new approach for reducing the special needs education and including the pupils in the ordinary education based on some shared principles:

- We have the budgets we have, and have to find the best ways of using them.

- The key factor is flexibility and high quality in early intervention, adapted tuition and ordinary education.

- The principles of special needs education has to be included in the ordinary education.

- Every pupil has to be treated individually and get adapted tuition as early as possible.

- As the leading principle, pupils shall have their education inside the main classroom together with the other pupils.

- The schools have to develop their 'toolbox' and show PPT (multi-disciplinary teams) and parents that the pupils get a better situation in this way of working.

- The funding must not stimulate models for exclusion.

After three years, the results in national tests and pupil surveys showed huge improvement.

New possibilities…..?:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Total cost education (3200 lessons)	Nkr 83.200.000	Nkr 83.200.000	Nkr 83.200.000	Nkr 83.200.000	Nkr 83.200.000	Nkr 83.200.000
Amount special education	11%	11,9%	8,4%	4,9%	4,08%	4,47%
% cost for lessons special education of all lessons	22,6%	20%	17,6%	15,3%	17,3%	
Cost special education	18.803.000	16.640.000	14.643.000	12.279.600	14.393.600	
Saved money used for early efforts		2.163.200	4.160.000	6.073.600	4.409.600	

Figure 16. Costs of special education

Reading 9th grade:

Lesing 9.klasse	2014-2015	Lesing 9.klasse	2015-2016	Lesing 9.klasse	2016-17
Audnedal kommune - Lesing	52	Marnardal kommune - Lesing	55	Sirdal kommune - Lesing	58
Marnardal kommune - Lesing	60	Audnedal kommune - Lesing	55	Audnedal kommune - Lesing	55
Songdalen kommune - Lesing	54	Songdalen kommune - Lesing	54	Flekkefjord kommune - Lesing	55
Kristiansand kommune - Lesing	54	Vennesla kommune - Lesing	53	Farsund kommune - Lesing	54
Kvinesdal kommune - Lesing	50	Sirdal kommune - Lesing	53	Mandal kommune - Lesing	54
Lindesnes kommune - Lesing	53	Lyngdal kommune - Lesing	53	Vennesla kommune - Lesing	54
Lyngdal kommune - Lesing	51	Lindesnes kommune - Lesing	53	Kristiansand kommune - Lesing	53
Sirdal kommune - Lesing	54	Kvinesdal kommune - Lesing	53	Lindesnes kommune - Lesing	53
Vennesla kommune - Lesing	52	Kristiansand kommune - Lesing	53	Lyngdal kommune - Lesing	53
Farsund kommune - Lesing	51	Flekkefjord kommune - Lesing	52	Songdalen kommune - Lesing	52
Flekkefjord kommune - Lesing	.	Søgne kommune - Lesing	52	Kvinesdal kommune - Lesing	51
Mandal kommune - Lesing	53	Mandal kommune - Lesing	52	Søgne kommune - Lesing	50
Søgne kommune - Lesing	52	Farsund kommune - Lesing	52	Hægebostad kommune - Lesing	
Åseral kommune - Lesing	.	Åseral kommune - Lesing	50	Marnardal kommune - Lesing	
Hægebostad kommune - Lesing		Hægebostad kommune - Lesing		Åseral kommune - Lesing	

Figure 17. Results in national tests and pupil surveys

The municipality of Dovre:

The Dovre model means that if there are two teachers in the classroom in mathematics, Norwegian and English, there will be two teachers in the classroom. For Year 1 and 2, there will be two teachers in all subjects.

The goal of the Dovre model is for all students to receive follow-up in the classroom, experience inclusion and avoid stigmatisation. This is crucial in terms of both social and academic learning. They worked systematically and gained very good results by doing this.
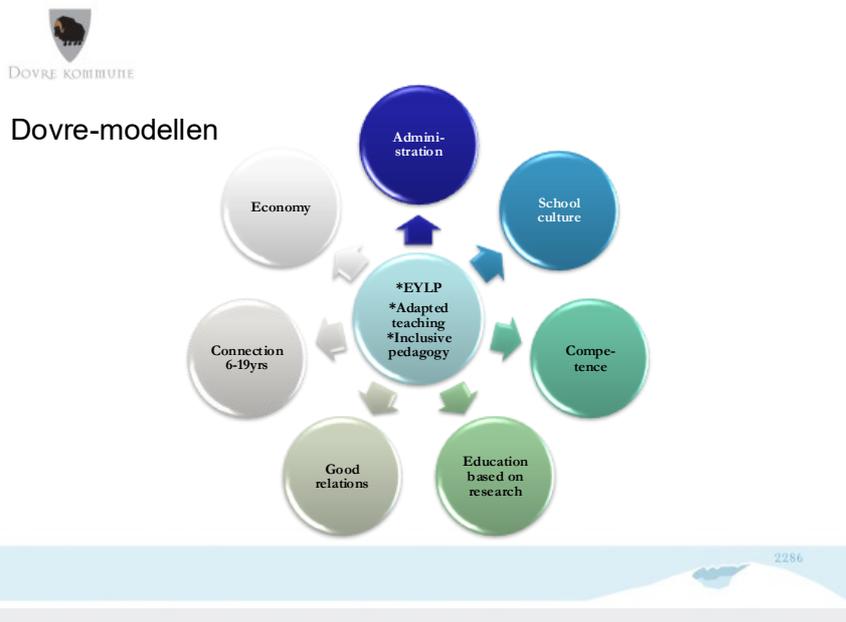
Figure 18. The Dovre model

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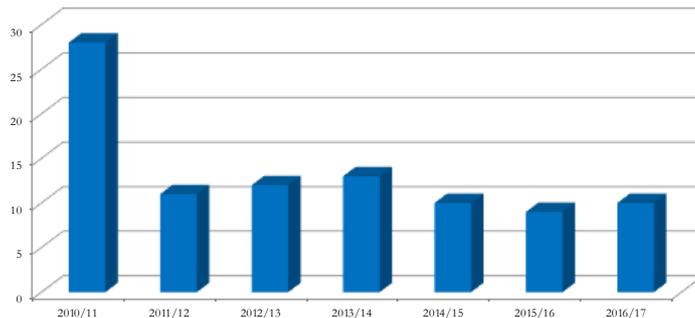
Number of pupils with special needs education before and after the
introduction of the " Dovremodel" Autumn 2011

Figure 19. Before and after the Dovre model

Prizes to promote inclusion – The Benjamin Prize and Queen Sonja School Prize

The Benjamin Prize is awarded each year to a school that works well against racism and discrimination. The prize bears the name of Benjamin Hermansen who was killed at 15 years old in Oslo in 2001. His murder was racially motivated. The schools receiving the award are actively working against racism and all discriminatory attitudes and actions. The award ceremony takes place in connection with the annual commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

A proposed school is considered for nomination according to given criteria. The school's work against racism and discrimination must be rooted in the school's long-term work. Involvement: The school's work against racism and discrimination must involve all school actors. Visibility: The school's work against racism and discrimination must be visible in schools and local communities.

Selbu Lower Secondary School was awarded the Benjamin Prize 2022 for its long-term and systematic work against racism and discrimination. The principal of Selbu Lower Secondary School said that 'Receiving the award provides motivation and inspiration to continue working with human rights, understanding democracy and citizenship. It is also a recognition of a great work that has been done over several years.

Jury chair and director of the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies pointed out that 'The work carried out at Selbu Lower Secondary School against racism

and discrimination is impressive and could be inspiring for other schools. It was a pleasure for the jury to highlight Selbu as the winner.'

The Queen Sonja School Prize is awarded every two years to a school that has distinguished itself by practicing equity and inclusion. The winning school will receive NOK 250,000, a work of art designed by the Queen and a diploma.

Award criteria: The school works long-term, systematically, and knowledge-based with the students' learning environment. The school practices equity and inclusion in such a way that each student experiences being valued in an environment characterised by participation, security, and community. The school is characterised by positive relationships between the students and the staff, and between the students, and by a good co-operation between school and home.

In 2021, Sandnessjøen Upper Secondary School was awarded the prize. The school has long-term work with inclusion and safeguarding of a good learning environment, where they see the individual student and they work systematically to ensure that the students have a community and a safe school, said jury chair. Many of the students live in dormitories, and the school arranges several evening activities for all students at the school. It is important for the school to involve the students in everything they do, and the school has a good and systematic co-operation with the students' homes. The school's vision is 'quality – with an eye for the individual'. The jury also emphasises that the school is a positive driving force in the local community and co-operates with local businesses to secure apprenticeships for its vocational students.

Sweden – A great need for improvement capacity since inequity has grown

The acceptance of professional uncertainty and work for deeper understanding of needs

Pettersson (2005) and Pettersson and Liljeroth (2011) followed the schooling of a boy with autism spectrum disorder over ten years. The findings emphasise the importance of courage, leadership and creating knowledge and confidence in finding effective ways of working. In 2001, the special educator formulated that '*we are not good at children like Oscar. How can we become better?*' The statement was based on the experiences made in the pre-school class of 'chaos' and 'constant outbursts. The principal tried to instil courage in the strained situation: 'Oscar is going to grow up and live in his hometown. Then he should be able to go to our school with the other children. We cannot say that Oscar cannot go to our school if we have not even tried.' (Pettersson and Liljeroth, 2011, p. 15). Pettersson (2005) describes what led to a functioning pedagogical everyday life: information about who Oscar was and how he functioned in different situations, the principal's decision that two educators would initially work with Oscar and the gradual creation of concrete and reflected planning that worked for Oscar. The core was the creation of a good relationship with Oscar, to understand his motivation and attitude to content and forms, and that the work team created a kind of 'step-before strategy'.

Eventually, Oscar became part of a group of 40 children. Clarification was made for Oscar by adapting the content, explaining how long different activities lasted and telling him where he would be and with whom (Pettersson and Liljeroth, 2011, pp. 20–22). The following factors proved to be effective: conscious strategies for dialogue between pupil, family and school staff, an expectation that everyone had something to contribute to the

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process, a conscious approach to how to treat pupil and family, and a treatment that was characterised by respect, empathy and unpretentiousness. A crucial mechanism for a changed way of thinking and working at school was *systematic collegial observation, documentation and reflection that provided a common knowledge and action basis* for thinking and acting (Pettersson and Liljeroth, 2011, p. 100).

The possibility to change from poor to great inclusive capability and outcomes

Persson and Persson (2011) did a three-year study of a school´s development in the Swedish municipality of Essunga, with a follow up study on the further development of a selection of the pupils in different upper secondary school (Persson and Persson, 2016). This school development is a kind of 'tipping-point-case', which shows that it is possible for educators, with the support of management and support functions, to actually meet and include all students with higher impact, at the same cost. The outcome is remarkable: in 2007, the municipality was one of Sweden's worst municipalities in terms of the proportion of students with upper secondary school qualifications (76%), students who achieved the goals in all subjects and the average credit value. In 2010, the municipality was one of the three highest ranked in Sweden and all students had upper secondary school qualifications (Persson and Persson, 2011, pp. 164–171). The factor behind this was an authoritative and distributed leadership where collaboration between the principal and the special educator was crucial for the development of a new common style of thinking: a clear pedagogical leadership in the classroom, a common structure in teaching, effective lesson time, 'iron check' on students' development, individual solutions, homework help and their ambition to succeed (Persson and Persson, 2011).

In a follow-up study of pupils, identified as 'pupils with challenges' during their compulsory years in Essunga, the focus was on experiences and outcomes in different upper secondary schools in other municipalities. The study found that the years in grades 7–9 in the Essunga school had provided the pupils with enough self-efficacy concerning what they needed to manage and to communicate their need for support in a new foreign school environment (Persson and Persson, 2016).

During the same period the German municipality, Flensburg, and especially one school, Waldschule, showed the same amazing move from low quality to high quality in terms of inclusive capability and pupils´ achievement (European Agency, 2013; Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016). Both Essunga and Flensburg showed some interesting mechanisms for learning and change among professionals illustrated below:

Mechanism for transformation <small>(Skoglund & Stäcker, 2016)</small>

Figure 20. Mechanism for transformation (Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016)

The fundamental trigger was that suddenly the principals and the teachers realised that they were producing bad outcomes. Some 25–30% of the pupils did not reach the upper secondary high school. Before, both schools' predominant explanation for this had been a blame on the students, the parents or the poor socio-economic situation in the community. This time, this cause-effect-model was challenged by two things:

1. in both contexts, external researchers or advisors started to influence the thinking of what was causing bad results;

2. the schools started to systematically ask the pupils how they perceived the school. The results were dark.

A huge amount of the pupils did not really want to be in school and did not feel helped. By this recognition, a new understanding of cause and effect grew up: It revealed that the professionals – the school and its staff – could be the causing factors of outcomes. This influenced the third factor.

3. Before, when meeting diversity or pupils that did not 'fit in', the schools had transferred the problem by more resources, i.e. placement in separate group to a much higher cost, but no positive results. Now, it was not about 'more resources' anymore, but rather about an analysis of how one is using the current resources. All these movements could possibly have happened without any real changes as results.

4. The schools reached out from their own 'black box' or horizon, and turned to alternative ways to think and act mainly based on research results and proven

experience by others. By studying this material in small groups with assignment to draw conclusion for practice, a change occurred in practice.

5. The teachers became more open and visible for each other, by sharing and supporting. Over time, a more common agreement on how to introduce, instruct and monitor grew stronger, and there was an increase in variation and differentiation in teaching established.

6. The schools also realised the importance to continuously strive toward a stronger community of practice (concerning what is the direction, goals, attitudes, means that can meet the challenges and preconditions the pupils have).

7. The fundamental shift was the acceptance of the importance of professional learning in everyday work, in order to be able to support pupils' learning (Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016).

However, one has to realise that the sustainability factor needs to be highlighted. It is great to change from bad results to good results, but it is another thing to make the situation sustain. In the case of Essunga, a 'bounce back' to old professional thought-action mode did occur and after three years, the results where almost the same as before the positive development. Here, we need more knowledge on how to sustain positive results. In this case, it is plausible that when the energetic principal left, continuity was secured by the special pedagogue who became the new principal for one year, but after she left, the new leaders did have the same vision and skills, nor did many newly recruited teachers have the same 'history' to lean on.

The importance of supported principals in order to make improvements

Another successful strategy of work we label as 'The Focus Spiral of Gislaved´, showing how focus on school improvement is upheld by an experienced leader/mentor and a development leader, who work together with all principals having the same function (e.g., school year 7–9). It is not only a learning community for the principals, it is also distributed throughout the system, all the way to the pupils.

To conclude, the results show that schools can by themselves transform and improve the school's inclusive capability and pupil's achievement. One important condition seems to be that it is 'the right person' with the right ideas, understanding and competence that can handle the situation. However, not all principals/rectors are that experienced, and therefore it is a risk to let all principals 'do their own work'. Functional strategies in order to handle this are:

- As we understand, the principals at both Mæla (an earlier case) and Oddeyrarskóli revealed one key factor: they have organised a sort of 'school management team' composed of two or three joint leaders, which ensures that they do not become 'lonely principals/rectors.

- The Gislaved Spiral shows that another way to meet the reality, in terms of diverse capacity among principals/rectors, is to organise continuous support from the head of schools and the local authority to the principals/rectors. Local authority support to principals/rectors has a positive effect on principals'/rectors´ development and collegiality, which makes the system less vulnerable to changes. However, principals/rectors can themselves transform and develop their school, but in that case, it seems important to organise at school management team level. The risk without a supportive local school authority is, however, that the discontinuity can increase with the fact that the work environment is lonely and straining.
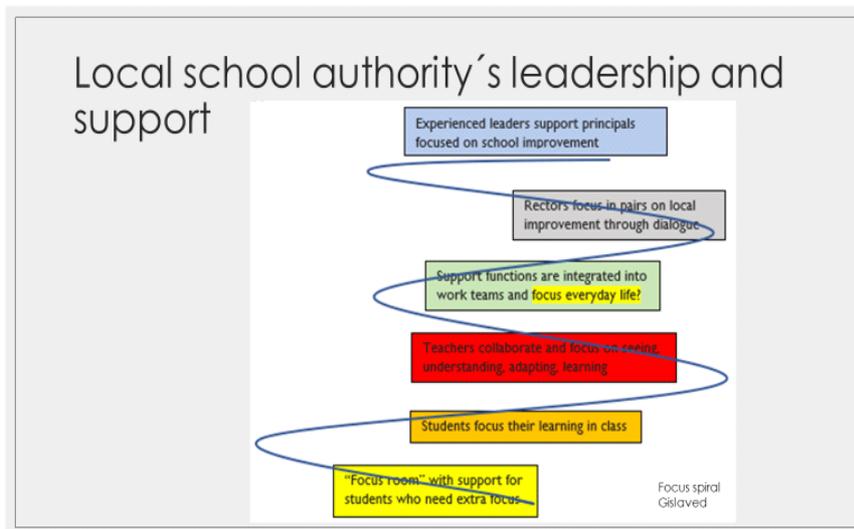
Figure 21. Local school authority's leadership and support

Our main argument concerning local school authorities, is that if the goal is to create a good work environment and to be legitimate in the eyes of principals/rectors, support functions and teachers, *there needs to be a common focus not just on budget and goals, but also on the key factors for successful schooling and the hardships and uncertainties that need to be handled.*

At all levels, there is a need for clear strategy for personalised learning, professionalised teaching, networks and collaboration, and intelligent accountability. There is also a need for clarifying some guiding principles that should be present in any learning environment. Finally, there needs to be an 'intelligent implementation' or as we rather express it, a supported transformation process. In this aspect, the local authorities are especially important.

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Local comparison between schools indicates important factors for inclusive capability-a tool for local authorities to support schools

In connection with the two cases above, Malmqvist (2016) did a comparative case study of three schools based on the following research questions:

- Are there any schools situated in the same Swedish municipality that have the same socio-economic conditions in their catchment areas but have substantial long-term differences concerning exclusion rates to Pupil Referral Units?

- How do schools with the same socio-economic conditions in their catchment areas, but with substantial differences in exclusion rates to Pupil Referral Units, work with special needs provision in relation to inclusion and exclusion?

Malmqvist (2016) concluded that there are disputes about the definition of inclusion and the definition of behavioural difficulties, which makes it hard to provide the present knowledge. He refers to Dyssegaard and Sørgaard (2013) and states that it is unclear what is required for successful inclusion, as well as a lack of knowledge on how inclusive educational practices can prevent pupils from being excluded.

The school results related to work towards either inclusion (school A) or exclusion (schools B and C), and focus on a very small minority of children in school. Pupils 'with' emotional and behavioural difficulties are regarded as one of the greatest challenges to inclusion. These children are often described as *having* behavioural difficulties that may be viewed by some as personal traits. The results from this study indicate that the number of children viewed as having behaviour problems, and thus facing the risk of being excluded, is closely related to the quality of their schools regarding work with special needs education. Malmqvist used a retroductive–comparative approach.

'It provided unequivocal outcomes of inclusion via exclusion rates as it revealed schools with almost the same socio-economic conditions in their catchment areas but substantial long-term differences concerning exclusion rates to PRUs. This answered the first research question in the affirmative and also prompted a 'Why?'.'

The case studies by Malmqvist made it clear that whereas school A worked strongly towards inclusion in their work with special needs provision, schools B and C did not. The study also made clear that the accomplishments of school A in its work towards inclusion, at the same time as preventing deep exclusion, had been achieved without any indication that it had negatively affected academic goal attainment among peers.

'The results from this study, completed in an era when behavioural difficulties are most often seen as behavioural difficulties within children, call for a redirection of focus from individuals' behaviours to educational factors. More precisely, the approach used in this study, coming at causality backwards, resulted in important educational findings of differences between schools. School A, especially, with its use of inclusive-related practices, provides a convincing example to learn from in work towards inclusion and in preventing [emotional and behavioural difficulties].' (Malmqvist, 2016, p. 358f)

Focus schools – a strategy to support schools in deep need of improvement

Kristianstad municipality has created a fruitful approach to schools with great challenges (low quality and low results). It was decided in 2016 and has been refined step by step,

and is still in use (Kristianstad municipality. 'Fokusskola-Processbeskrivning'. Fastställd 2016-06-09 *Updated 2019-02-28).*

The overall framework is the following:

Anchorage	Mapping& Analysis	Supportmeasures	Follow- up
Dialogue begins with the school in question. The goals and purpose of the Focus school initiative are anchored with the relevant school management. The local authority's expected long-term effects in the following areas are anchored with the school management. 1) Goal achievement 2) Safety and working environment 3) Organization	A survey of the school is carried out. Methods for this can include interviews with leaders, staff, students and parents, surveys, observations of teaching and processes within the school. Analysis of data is done by the operational group and an action plan with short-term and long-term goals is developed with the current school management. The goals must be linked to the goals.	Decided initiatives are implemented with support from various actors. The efforts are led by the school management and coordinated by the development strategist.	The initiative is followed up within the framework of the local authority's systematic quality work and annual follow-up. The efforts at school level are continuously followed up and evaluated by a performance dialogue between the head of schools, the principal and the operational group. Regular follow-up with staff, pupil and possibly parents is done.
0-1 month	2-4 months	12-36 months	Continuously

Figure 22. Kristianstad municipality framework

The underlying idea is to 'normalise' the situation of the school in focus. It begin with the anchoring of the local authority's expectations with the school management at the specific school and it aims to help the school to be prepared, having enough improvement capacity to be a part of the general systematic quality work.

This approach is promising in order to handle schools with deep going challenges to create professional quality and achievement of pupils.

Nordic network – Not just steering, it is also about support and challenge

In the Nordic network studies we indicated the importance of *both supporting and challenging the core activity in classrooms and schools.* In this, local authority, principals as well as support functions as special pedagogues and special teachers are of great importance as enablers. However, there need to be a great deal of synchronisation in mind and action in order to provide both a supporting and challenging attitude of mind. This is not about doing one 'change' or 'injection' and then it is fixed. Rather it seemed to be about a three step processes:

1. Step 1 for principals and support functions: strengthen the inclusive capability in each ´learning environment´!

2. Step 2: sustaining collegial work to become a learning community within each school, and to learn and develop by collective proven experience at school level!

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3. Step 3: continuous work to become a professional and sharing local community between schools and with the surrounding society, by ´inviting´ in creative ways, making the school to a more open ´square' for local community development.

The key seems, as in the study of the Essunga school, to be a continuous process of challenge the current ´thought-action-mode´, and provide time, structure and support to make deeper learning possible among teachers.

Improvement of family involvement

Finland

Co-operation between home and school

Under the Basic Education Act, instruction and education shall be organised in co-operation with guardians, ensuring that each pupil receives instruction, guidance and support indicated by their level of development and needs. This co-operation supports the organisation of education, ensuring that each pupil receives instruction, guidance and support indicated by their developmental level and needs. The participation of guardians and their possibilities of being involved in schoolwork and its development are a key part of the school culture. The educational co-operation between home and school improves the well-being and safety of the pupil, the class and the entire school community. The primary responsibility for bringing up a child rests with the guardians. The school supports the home's educational task and carries the responsibility for instructing and educating the pupil as a member of the school community.

Responsibility for developing the preconditions for co-operation between home and school rests with the education provider. The point of departure for this co-operation is building trust, equality and mutual respect. The diversity of families and their needs for information and support are taken into consideration. In order to the co-operation to be successful, the school staff must act with initiative, interact personally with the guardians and ensure versatile communication by other means.

The guardians are offered opportunities for getting acquainted with the school's daily life and participating in the planning, evaluation and development of the school's activities and objectives of the educational work together with the school staff and pupils. Joint discussions on values lay the foundation for co-operation in educating the children.

Co-operation between home and school during the provision of support

When a pupil needs support, co-operation between home and school becomes more significant. During the entire period of basic education and in transitions, practices of co-operation and operating models are developed. The guardians are informed of their application to daily school life, for example as regards the processing of issues that concern the pupil, access to and disclosure of information and confidentiality. It is vital that the school staff contact the home as soon as learning difficulties or problems with school attendance appear or when the pupil's well-being is at risk.

The pupils and guardians are informed of the possibilities of receiving support, the three-level support system and the available forms of support. The guardians, for their part, are

encouraged to support their children in goal-oriented learning. Assessment of the pupil's progress and need for support and the planning of the support is part of regular co-operation between home and school. However, the pupil or the guardian may not refuse to accept support prescribed in the Basic Education Act.

Digital communication between teachers and parents

Parents' and teachers' well-functioning communication supports their partnership, benefits pupils' well-being and learning results and contributes to pupils' optimal holistic development. Efficient communication is a prerequisite for fruitful collaboration. Today communication largely takes place using electronic tools, and face-to-face meetings are rare.

Digital devices have intensified such communication, as smartphones allow quick online feedback. However, despite the change in communication and feedback practices, teachers do not have much training in digital communication skills, a lack that sometimes leads to misunderstandings between parents and teachers. (Alanko, A. 2018)

Finnish teacher education programmes still need more explicit content related to communication between parents and teachers. At the moment, there is a lack of detailed knowledge of the nature of parent-teacher digital communication and of the specific needs of both parties. The parent-teacher partnership is considered important at the national level, and teacher education departments are expected to provide instruction in this area.

The website and events by the Finnish National Agency for Education

Parents should know the basics about school. The website provides information on home-school co-operation, events and materials to help parents get to know the school world. These include short courses, guides and podcasts.

Parents can find information on bullying prevention in the Finnish National Agency for Education's guide

The guide to anti-bullying work is the first national guide to anti-bullying work. The guide provides guidance on preventing and dealing with bullying in schools and educational institutions. It covers, among other things, the responsibilities and duties of the education provider, the head teacher, the teacher and the student welfare service, key legislation and co-operation with different authorities.

The guide also explains the rights and responsibilities of pupils and guardians and the challenges of online bullying. The work is supported by ready-to-use presentation material for schools and instructions for pupils and parents.

The world's largest parent-teacher meeting

The world's largest parent-teacher meeting was organised for the first time in 2017 to celebrate Finland's 100 years of independence. The idea was to arrange an event which is extensive and useful on an international scale and focuses on the future of education.

Every school in Finland was holding a parent-teacher meeting where parents received information on the school world and got the opportunity to ask questions and had a voice

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in how things are done. In later years, the event has been held online as a national event organised by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

Since parents have an important role in the transformation of the school, the world's largest parent-teacher meeting covers the challenges the changing schools are facing and present various inspiring operating models.

Norway – Organisation of family co-operation

At state level, we have a Parents' Committee for Kindergartens (FUB) and a Parents' Committee for basic education (FUG).

FUB can assist parents and kindergartens and give information and guidance relating to the child's stay and well-being and hold lectures about co-operation between home and kindergartens

FUG guides both parents and school staff in matters concerning children and young people's everyday life and learning at school. They provide advice and guidance to parents on co-operation between home and school, and must ensure that the parents' voice is heard in school policy matters. In addition they hold lectures on how co-operation between home and school can be strengthened.

The co-operation between school and home is laid down as a fundamental principle in section 1-1 of the Education Act. The formal co-operation is described in section 11. A close and committed collaboration between home and school is crucial for realising the common tasks teachers and parents have. The co-operation between school and home encompasses many aspects of the school's activities. The school is responsible for establishing co-operation with parents.

At each primary school, there shall be a student council for grades 5-7 and for grades 8-10 with representatives of the pupils.

Also, there shall be a co-operative committee with two representatives for the teaching staff, one for the second employee, two for the parent council, two for the pupils and two for the municipality. There will also be a school environment committee where the pupils, the parent council, the employees, the school tenant and the municipality must be represented. It shall be set together so that the representatives of the pupils and the parents together have the majority.

Views from pupils, parents and teachers

In the Pupil Survey have included four questions on how the learners experience expectations and support from home.

In the Parent Survey, parents and guardians of pupils from grade 1 up to and including first year of upper secondary, have their say on the pupils' learning and well-being and the co-operation between home and school. It is voluntary for the schools if they want to conduct the survey.

The results of the Teacher Survey are used by the school, school owners and the state education administration to help analyse and develop the learning environment. Data from the survey can also be used for research.

The surveys allow pupils and apprentices to express their views on the learning environment in their schools and training establishments. The surveys provide important information for all the responsible bodies.

The Pupil Survey is mandatory at levels 7, 10 and 11.

The Apprentice Survey is mandatory for apprentices during the second year of apprenticeship. In addition, there are user surveys which are voluntary, such as the Teacher Survey, the Parent Survey, and the Adult Education Survey.

Around 85 per cent of the learners feel that they have good support from their teachers. They find that most or all of the teachers care about them, believe in them, treat them with respect, and provide good academic help. The proportion who feel that they have such support is highest in the lower grades. As students get older, the proportion decreases somewhat. The proportion is lowest at 9. and 10. steps, while the experience of support increases slightly in vg1 (Wendelborg and Utmo 2022, Directorate for education and training, The education mirror 2022).

There are some differences in parents' assessment of school depending on what grade the child is at. Parents become less satisfied the longer the children are in school. The differences between the grades are not great, but in some areas there is a distinct fall. This applies in particular to the co-operation between home and school, where the collaboration is perceived as less active in the higher grades. The same applies to the experience of support from teachers.

A common reason why co-operation between home and school becomes difficult is when students exhibit a lot of negative behaviour. Then it is easy to focus on the negative the student is doing.(Webster-Stratton and Herman, 2010). The attention on positive aspects is missing.

In an article from 2017, Kari Stamland Gusfre states that some may argue that school can compensate for the importance of parents, which may form the basis for school policy measures such as help with homework and after school support. The basic idea is to even out social inequality by allowing schools and teachers to take greater responsibility for what has previously been regarded as the parents' task, based on a perception that not all children experience receiving the support they need from home.

School contribution indicators

On behalf of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, Statistics Norway in 2005 produced a report on how to create indicators that measure the school's contribution to learning. Statistics Norway has also calculated indicators that say something about how much each school contributes to the students' learning.

Each student who starts primary school brings with them many prerequisites that affect the results he or she gets. It is therefore unclear what we can attribute to the school's efforts. Because what does the teachers' ability to communicate subjects and motivate the students, and the school's work with the learning environment and differentiated instruction, really mean for the students' results? It is precisely the school's efforts that the school contribution indicators are trying to show.

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To measure the school's contribution, we must separate out the part of the learning outcome that is due to the pre-requisites the students bring with them. The school contribution is checked for previous student performance. In addition, it is checked for parental background (parents' level of education, household income and students' immigrant background).

The school contribution indicators provide no explanation as to why the contribution is the way it is. They must be seen in the context of the local knowledge base and other available information about the state of the school, such as learning outcomes and the learning environment.

For students, there are no results earlier than national tests in 5th grade. For the 1st–4th grade indicator, it is therefore only checked for family background. It therefore does not provide such a precise estimate of the school's contribution compared to the other grades.

An indication – not an absolute truth

There are factors that affect the students' results that we do not know or cannot measure. For example, it may be the influence of family and friends or illness. It is therefore not possible to calculate the school's real contribution, but we can get an indication of the school's contribution.

What subjects and topics do the indicators say anything about?

The school contribution indicators in grades 1–4 and grades 5–7 say something about the school's contribution to students' basic skills in English, reading and arithmetic.

Similarly, the school contribution indicators for 8th–10th grades is a measure of the school's contribution to the students' learning in the exam subject the student encounters.

Beyond this, the indicators do not say anything about schools' contribution to pupils' learning in other subjects. Nor does it say anything about the school's ability to carry out other parts of the school's mission.

How to read the indicators?

A school contribution indicator can be interpreted as the difference between what the school's students actually achieve (for example, the average grade on the written exam 10th grade) and what we expect students to achieve when we take into account the students' pre-requisites.

To take into account the student base, we look at the students' previous results, e.g. on national tests 8th grade for students who finished lower secondary school, and/or family background (parents' education, household income and immigrant background).

If a school has an actual result that is in line with the expected result, the school contribution will be equal to the average for all schools in the country – which is zero.

Indicators with a negative sign indicate that the school has a school contribution that is below the national average. Indicators with a positive sign indicate that the school has a school contribution that is above the national average.

Thus, a negative value does not mean that the school contributes negatively to the students' results, but that the contribution is lower than the national average. School contributions are a relative size, where all schools are measured against a national average.

Highlights – primary and lower secondary schools

A large part of the differences in results between schools can be explained by differences in the student base. Half of the schools in Oslo perform significantly better than expected for grades 1–4. Very few schools in Oslo and Rogaland (southwest) perform lower than expected for grades 5–7. With few exceptions, there are small differences in contributions between the largest municipalities and between counties. Oslo, Bærum, Drammen (all capital area) and Sandnes og Stavanger (southwest) have contributions that are significantly above the average of both grades 1–4 and 5–7.

There are only small changes over time for larger municipalities and counties, while for smaller municipalities and schools it may vary more between years.

The spread is smaller in school contributions than in the results of national tests

The spread in schools' contributions is smaller than the spread in actual student outcomes. This means that a large part of the differences in results between schools can be explained by differences in the student base. The importance of schools for results on national tests is thus less than it might appear on the actual results of the schools.

Sweden – With greater heterogeneity, greater involvement is of vital importance

The importance of improving the relation between schools and society, especially promoting the involvement of parents

One challenge for all education systems is to develop the relation between schools, the parents and the surrounding society (organisations, businesses, leisure time clubs and so on). There will come more information in this area, but here I will pinpoint one promising example of development. For several years, the above-mentioned Nordic Network for Increased Inclusive Capability followed the development in several successful schools in Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Finland and Sweden. One of the schools did show extraordinary results starting from a very challenging situation. The Stigeråsen school is situated in the municipality of Skien in the south of Norway (Based on data from Kim Aas, Principal at Stigeråsen: 23-01-09).

Stigeråsen is located in a challenging area with more than 50% of the 300 pupils from migrant groups, often living under limited conditions (many children and small area). The school has for several years been working in a systematic way to develop the school to be better at working both socially and professionally, based on a new strategy/vision: 'Stigeråsen mer enn en skole! / Stigeråsen primary school – more than a school'

The school was, in 2017, 'forced' to participate in a project to develop the learning environment at the school due to poor results at 'Elevundersøkelsen' (feedback from student regarding the quality of the learning environment). The school was several times in the local newspapers with negative focus on the school and the area. Many parents choose to let their children start at the neighbouring school and other schools because of

negative focus on Stigeråsen (and that the school had a bad reputation for many years). A special challenge was that the neighbouring school had parents with the highest average income and education levels in the municipality, while Stigeråsen has the lowest. Skien municipality has the third highest percentage of child poverty in Norway. Child poverty is a daily challenge for many of the families. Stigeråsen has always tried to find common ground for all the children and the families, independent of religion, cultural background, language etc. One year the school made the headlines of all national news because teachers included quotes from the Koran to show that Jesus was common to both Islamic and Christian religions. There was a lot of resistance in national and local media, but support from parents and their own organisation.

One important feature at Stigeråsen is that all staff members have to participate and 'agree on our way of being a school!', Kim Aas states:

1. Work systematically to make all employees equally important.

2. 'Include everybody' = everybody has to contribute.

3. Establish and practice and a visible focus on «we/everybody».

4. Clarify values everybody supports and practices.

5. Where do we want to be in 5 years, 10 years…etc?

6. Establish a culture for sharing.

7. Implement structures that make sure that the organisation shares and evaluates the process. Structures that will put things together.

8. Leadership shall be close to practice

Stigeråsen's example can be combined with the experiences of supporting and following up a mid-size municipality (Mölndal) concerning both process support at school level and parent involvement (Andersson, Ferm and Skoglund, 2020). In essence, the model for parent involvement was based on the idea of early 'learning groups', consisting of five pupils/group in grade 1. In connection to these learning groups, the parents for each of the pupils were engaged in an early stage as promotors and supporters to the specific learning group concerning building a social learning group. This example showed promising results of showing parents' importance, not just for their own child, but also for the group and the whole school.

IV. TRANSFERABILITY: A MATTER OF WILL, CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

As indicated above transferability is a tricky question. Lincoln and Cuba (1985: 316) stated that 'It is, in summary, not the naturalist's task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers.' Transferability is not the same as generalisability, since transferability does not involve general claims. Rather it invites the 'applier' to make associations between elements of research or practice experience with

their own experience. A keyword is in this realm 'thick description', that means information enough of context, process and results.

Our learning examples are therefore put in the country context, the Nordic common context and the specific example's context (in time and space). Our model (Figure 1) is also a tool both for us presenting examples, and for the potential applier who can reflect her or his own context and system capacity to 'use' examples from another country.

Transferability of the multi-tier support model

New concepts have to struggle against a tendency favouring previous concepts and rigid forms of traditional teaching practices. If not properly identified and noted, underestimating these two elements may even contribute to fatal remedies regarding the intentions and goals of a new policy. The coexistence of old ways of thinking and doing and the attempt to formulate something new constitutes a dilemma (Norwich 1993).

Policy makers are rarely successful with education reform **unless they help people recognise what needs to change, and build a shared understanding and collective ownership for change;** unless they focus resources, build capacity, and create the right policy climate with accountability measures designed to encourage innovation and development, rather than compliance; and unless they tackle institutional structures that, too often, are built around the interests and habits of systems rather than learners. **Where teachers are not engaged in the design of change, they will rarely help with the implementation of change.** (OECD, 2019).

The models of multi-tier support are implemented in different countries based on similar background philosophies: the right to receive the best possible preventive support for learning and participation. The Finnish reform after many phases, developed into a model in similar to the U.S. RTI model, at least on the surface. However, there are many differences that might give new insights to any country planning to develop similar frameworks. For example, the current U.S. model aims for the identification and prevention of further learning difficulties (Compton et al., 2012) by placing a student within a suitable tier of intervention. The Finnish model mainly aims at supporting learning at the earliest time point possible within the three-tiered framework.

Björn et al. (2016) have compared the U.S. and the Finnish model and found that the Finnish RTI is mainly an administrative structure for support. The U.S. RTI includes clear definitions regarding the intensity, duration, and content of support provided within each tier whereas the Finnish version contains no explicit guidelines for support. Finally, the U.S. RTI assumes no special educational services in the first two tiers, but the Finnish framework includes special educational services from the onset of support.

When considering the application of different models to a different context, it is important to look for the areas you want to improve and to explore which model would offer the best solutions. Pierce, J. and Jackson D. (2017) proposed 10 steps to make RtI effective in the school:

1. **Focus on Leadership** – It is crucial to get full commitment of school leaders to implement the RtI framework in the school. When school leaders commit to the implementation of the framework and clearly express their support of it and participate in setting goals and planning how to improve student learning,

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social skills and emotional wellbeing the teachers, other school staff and parents also commit to the implementation of the RtI. It all begins with a leader's vision and the determination to provide the budget, staffing, and resources to support a school-wide effort.

2. **Building of capacity and resource allocation** – The school leaders have to ensure that teachers and other school staff have access to the resources they need to make RTI work, including high-quality professional development opportunities.

3. **Getting everybody on board** – For RTI to become deeply rooted, teachers, other staff, parents, administrators, school board members, and district staff must believe in the framework. To ensure it the success stories have to be shared as it enables stakeholders to see the value in learning new instructional and assessment practices, which likely require changes in the way they have typically worked with students. Also, the roles of all stakeholders should be clarified. Because staff will have to take on new roles with RTI, they need to be clear about what their new work will look like and why they have been assigned to fill those roles.

4. **Creation of the RtI team** – Every school implementing RTI should have a team focused on the use of the framework. RTI touches every aspect of a school, so the RTI team should broadly reflect all of the staff roles. The team should include the principal and other administrators with decision-making authority, subject teachers, support staff (e.g. psychologist, speech therapist), special education teacher, other support staff (e.g. nurse, personal assistant).

5. **Choosing the data strategically** – Schools should next identify the best data sources to use with RTI implementation. At a minimum, schools should plan to use annual fall, winter, and spring screening results to identify students at risk of not meeting grade-level standards. It is critical that schools choose a screening tool that best meets their needs. The purpose of universal screening is to take a snapshot of all students' reading or math skills and determine their risk status. Additionally, progress monitoring results for students served in Tiers 2 and 3 are critical sources of information about students' responsiveness to instruction. It is important that RTI team members and the staff working directly with students get the support they need to collect, analyse, and use RTI-related data.

6. **Determining which students are at risk** – Using a valid, reliable screening tool is the first step in determining which students are at risk of poor learning outcomes. Schools should employ universal screening two to three times a year. This lets school staff to identify students who may not have been at risk in a previous screening and monitor the risk status of students previously identified as at risk. In addition, regular data collection allows staff to critically evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction and interventions. To determine the level of instruction for each student and to match student needs with services, schools develop a data-based decision process. RTI teams determine which interventions are available and which students require more intense

instruction or interventions. Schools might administer a secondary assessment – a progress monitoring, diagnostic, or other more targeted informal assessment – to identify students' specific areas of need and to verify the universal screening results.

7. **Implementation of interventions** – All students should receive high-quality instruction differentiated to meet their needs. This is at the core of Tier 1 (Finland: general support) instruction. When students are not performing on grade level, instruction must be designed to meet the students where they are and advance them toward grade-level expectations. Instruction at Tier 2 (Finland: intensified support) is best delivered in small group settings based on the content and student developmental level. At this level, student data are monitored frequently, at least every other week, and student progress is measured to make sure the intervention is working. Students who do not make adequate progress with Tier 2 interventions will need a more individualised and intense intervention to address their skill gap at Tier 3.

8. **Close monitoring of students at Tier 2 and Tier 3** (Finland: special support) – Progress monitoring provides real-time information about overall student improvement (or the lack of it). It is important that teachers understand the unique value of progress monitoring compared to other types of assessments.

9. **Continuous coaching of teachers** – Continuous coaching is a critical follow-up to any RTI training. Coaching leads to improved teacher practice and student outcomes. Coaching enables staff to build on content learned from training to apply the newly acquired knowledge and skills to their classrooms. Coaching also equips teachers with skills to apply new practices over time until the new practices become a regular part of their teaching routine and it guides teachers toward making more nuanced adjustments to how they use these practices to better meet specific learning needs.

10. **Evaluation for consistent implementation** – Fidelity of RTI, or the skilful adherence to the model, allows educators to better understand if all essential components of RTI are being used and the degree to which those components were effective or ineffective.

Finland took most of these steps in the education reforms described earlier. Especially important are the first three: to support leadership, to build capacity and to take care that everybody is on board.

V.   FINAL REFLECTIONS

Finally, we will make some reflections and conclusions concerning improving inclusive qualities in education systems.

Firstly, it is very complex to make large education systems to function 'perfectly'. Therefore, it is rather about the *ability of responsible actors to constantly reflect* on 'which gaps and shortcomings do we have in our system (at national level, at local/district level,

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at school level and at classroom level, and in the relation between levels). In large this is about avoiding reactive output in education systems. There is a great risk of creating an education system that gets stuck in a what can be labelled as the 'find deficit loop'. The reason for this, according to Skoglund and Stäcker (2016), is an underestimation of the complexity and uncertainty of the everyday classroom. Teachers in this situation easily become *reactive, trying to handle different difficulties.* In law and the Swedish curriculum of 2010, there is a throughgoing recommendation to *be preventive,* but that is easier said than done. In the work over 20 years with 68 municipalities and thousands of schools in Sweden, the following underlying pattern was indicated: Schools change leaders, staff and pupils, organisation and ideas, but have a hard time to handle the underlying pattern. These patterns were also replicated in the Nordic project mentioned above.

'Teachers do work in a very complex context with maybe thirty pupils and thousands of impulses every day, which easily produce reactive behaviour. When several teachers come into a reactive manner, it can be 'scaled up' to the principal, who has to handle many complaints as '*I cannot handle this diversity, you need to do something.*' It is recognised that many principals are isolated in handling this, and they also easily become reactive, and escalate it. In the end it can be an education system in panic, where different stakeholders ask for quick changes. At every level, and in the system as a whole, it can be a question of shooting solutions from the hip. In the Swedish education system, something like that appeared at the national political level between 2008–2014, with some 20 reforms initiated in a very rapid manner.' (Skoglund, 2023).

'To successfully manage this, the core seems to be one of agreement and trust in a common development process of a 'build-school-loop'. Such a loop is grounded in sound evidence from research and proven experience on 'what works at each level of the system. It is also grounded in a capability to constructively relate between the levels.'
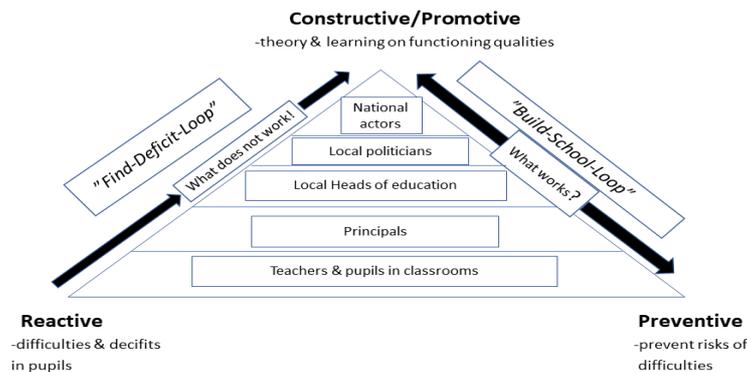
Figure 23. From find-deficit-loop to build-school-loop (Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016)

(Skoglund, 2023; compare Persson and Persson, 2011; Persson, 2013; Skoglund, 2013; Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016; Skoglund and Svanbjörnsdottir, 2020).

Secondly, inclusion is not at 'thing' or a 'state'. **It is rather about a continuous and sometimes challenged process in society and in education systems**. Concerning education systems as a complex combination of several levels of authority, inclusion is about the capability of all actors to improve fundamental qualities that promote all pupils to belong, to be heard and understood, to be lead, stimulated and supported to take part, learn and develop their competence and personality in order to handle their lives in society. *The term 'inclusion' cannot be defined in isolation – construct a practically relevant conceptual framework!*

We do see some ways to come to more clarity and understanding. The key seems to be to put different concepts or qualities together in a conceptual framework that originates both from conventions, the school law, and on a clear understanding of how the system is interconnected. One has to go from inclusion as a thing, to a process perspective with focus on the education system´s inclusive capabilities (Skoglund, 2013; 2015; Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016).
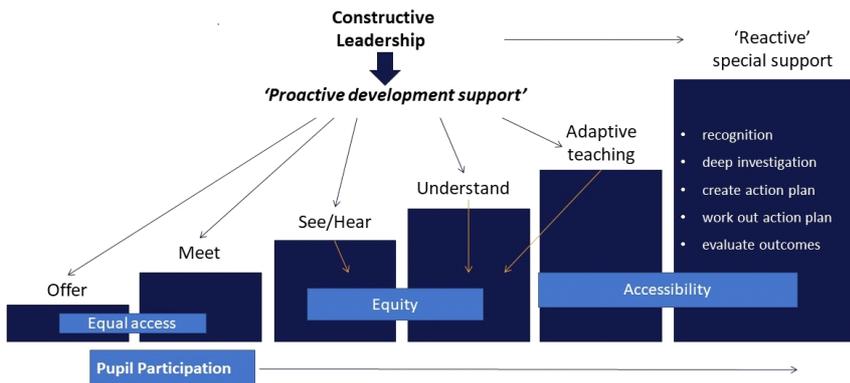
Figure 24. Developing a system where all actors are consciously aware of the necessity of being interconnected in a greater school community

Using this model, we can have a more linked understanding of what inclusion is about. It seems to be about *developing a system where all actors are consciously aware of the necessity of being interconnected in a greater school community.* A key of vital importance is to move from a placement perspective on inclusion towards a focus on the system´s inclusive capabilities. The model illustrates the most important capabilities to build up in order to be able to meet all pupils' needs.

When principals engage in and start a continued dialogue with a focus on those capabilities with the school management team, support functions and teachers, then the school starts what we can call a *'school building process'.* In our studies we find strongly the importance of creating a school management team, and it is especially important

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when a good principal leaves the school. It ensures that those qualities do not disappear, even though the principal leaves.

We also conclude the *importance of the support functions' integration with the everyday activity of teachers and pupils.* It is also important that these functions do have a broad development perspective on the interaction between teacher and pupils, instead of seeing the pupil as the problem. We have seen reactive tendencies in all our countries, meaning that the professionals try to take the problem away, for example by placing children in special groups or other schools. The problem with this is that you try to change only the student and not the system itself, the environment and teaching methods. But, however, *it is not enough to build capacity through new professionals and support functions. In order to make them function, there needs to be capability both at leadership level, among the support functions and among teachers.*

The essence of it all seems to be the common upholding of the linking factors: *Common perspective on what the school is, a professional common language that focuses on the capability factors above, and a curious learning attitude and method for continuous improvement of the system and the relationship with pupils and their parents.*

Thirdly, inclusion is, therefore, not something that one easily can 'implement' like a new schedule. Rather one should use terms as develop or improve the current way to think, organise and act so that there will be an increase in the actors 'inclusive capability'. Human actors do not 'jump' from one way to be, think and do, to another way to be, think and do. Anxiety 1 (unwillingness to change) is often prevalent (Schön, 1983). A supported learning process needs to be designed and upheld in order to create inclusive qualities and results that sustain.

Fourthly, learning examples from one owns or other contexts can be fruitful stimulation showing other alternative ways to think, organise and act, but almost always it seems vital to assume that there is a strong force of 'keeping the tradition going'. This implies that there needs to be a sense of urgency or necessity to improve, and move beyond the current habits. This Schön (1983) label as anxiety 2 (the willingness not to be 'left behind').

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> **Comentado [AG1]:** I can't find this one

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