

The Swedish Education System

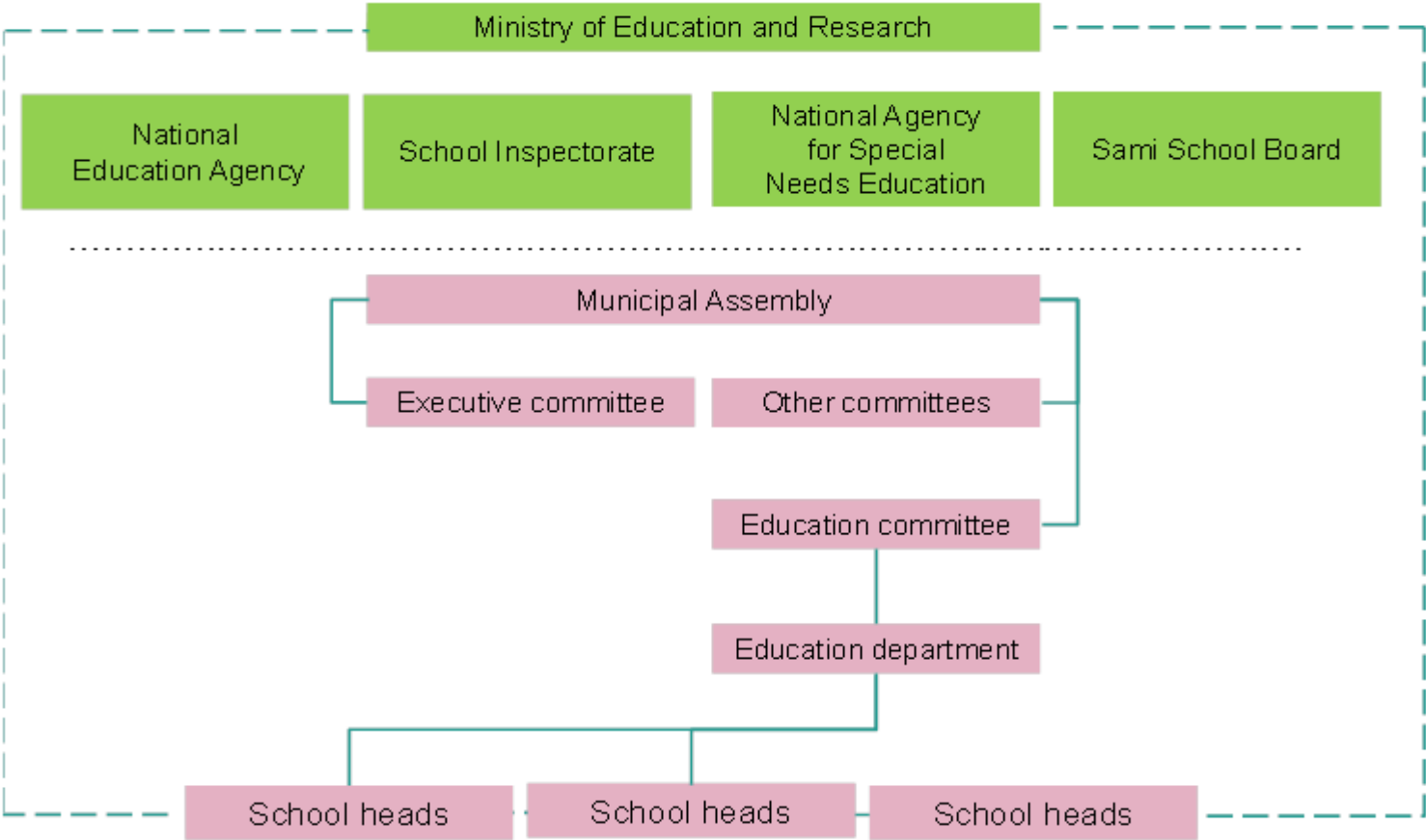
Exemplified by the city of Stockholm

General outline

- The task of the school is to encourage all students to discover their own unique qualities as individuals, to be able to participate fully in society.
- Goals and guidelines are set out in the *Education Act*, the curriculum and syllabuses. The choice of tools and methods are not regulated; they are left to individual school organisers to determine.
- All education is free of charge and is funded entirely through municipal and state grants.
- Parents / guardians can select school of choice for their children. There is always the option of changing schools, regardless of residing address.
- National tests are compulsory at the end of Year 3, 6 and 9.
- *The National School Inspectorate* inspects schools and makes sure they keep to all stipulated acts and regulations.



Governance of the Swedish public school system



Preschool



Photo: Sugplopp

- Provides a safe and stimulating environment and enables parents to combine parenthood with work or studies.
- Municipalities are obliged to offer placing within three months after guardian's application.
- Not free of charge, but heavily subsidised.
- Preschool activities emphasise basic values such as playing together, tolerance and consideration for others. Gender equality is also high on the agenda.
- Preschool is educational group activities for children from the age of 1.

Preschool class

- For children 6 years of age preschool class is organised. Its activities are regarded as education.
- A voluntary school form in its own right with a large element of creative work and play.
- The aim is to stimulate learning and development and prepare the children for compulsory school.
- Most often integrated into compulsory schools.
- All children must be offered a place in a preschool class at the age of 6.



- The vast majority of six-year-olds attends preschool class.
- Free of charge

Compulsory school



Photo: Jojje Olsson

- Most children start at the age of 7, after having attended childcare and preschool class.
- Compulsory school consists of nine years of schooling.
- No tracking; everyone follows the same path and the same curriculum.
- Students with learning disabilities have their own curriculum.
- Compulsory school is tax-financed, and schools are not allowed to claim any kind of fees from parents / guardians. (Not school lunch, teaching materials, outings; - nothing.)
- Education should be equivalent irrespective of organiser and location.

Out-of-school care



Photo: Randen Pederson

- Out-of-school care is regarded as education and has its own public curriculum.
- Close co-operation between leisure-time centres and school teachers is considered a success factor.
- Parents / guardians pay a subsidised fee based on their income for out-of-school care.
- Parents with low income are exempted from fees.
- All pupils aged 6 – 12 are entitled attendance at leisure-time centres connected to primary schools.

Upper secondary education



- All youth in Sweden who have completed compulsory school are entitled to a three-year, non-compulsory upper secondary school education.
- Provides a good foundation for vocational activities and further studies, as well as for personal development and active participation in society.
- Basically two path-ways: vocational and university preparatory. Wide range of programmes. “Introductory programme” offered for students who didn’t pass enough subjects in compulsory school.
- Virtually all students who finish compulsory school start upper secondary school.
 - Free of charge

Independent schools



Photo: Kristofferskolan.se

- Open to all. No fees in compulsory school.
- The organiser may be a company, a foundation or an association.
- Approved and inspected by the *National School Inspectorate*.
- Often have different orientations, such as Waldorf (Steiner-schools), English classes or cultural and sports profiles.
- Follow the same objectives as municipal schools, except for the few international schools whose curricula follow those of other countries.
- Funded equally as municipal schools. (See slide “School funding”)
- **Stockholm:** 20 -25% of the students in independent compulsory schools.
50 % of the students in independent upper secondary schools.
- **Sweden:** 14% in independent compulsory schools.
25% in independent upper secondary schools.

Grades



- Grades from Year 6 -> end of upper secondary school.
 - ❑ A – E = Pass
(*A = pass with special distinction*)
 - ❑ F = The only non-pass grade
- No final exams
- Admission to upper secondary school after compulsory school requires a pass grade in eight or twelve subjects, out of sixteen or seventeen . (Swedish, English and Maths have to be three of them.)

School funding



- Municipal as well as independent schools are funded through grants from students' home municipalities and through state grants.
- The funding system is based on a "school voucher" which follows each student to the school where he or she is enrolled.
- Vouchers differ depending on students' ages and between different types of schools as there are differences between municipalities and cost levels.
- No fees are allowed in compulsory school.
- Stockholm: In addition to the standard allowance socio-economic factors, (next slide), generate a higher school voucher.

Distribution of money in Stockholm 2015

Compulsory schools

- Base voucher $\approx 80\%$ of the total "school voucher grant" is allocated directly to schools
 $\approx 20\%$ to school buildings and central administration
 ≈ 720 MEUR

- SES (socio-economic status) $\approx 15\%$ extra ≈ 104 MEUR

The amount is calculated from an index per district, and is weighted against these variables:

- ❖ *years as a resident in Sweden*
- ❖ *guardian's level of education*
- ❖ *welfare recipients*
- ❖ *family situation (single parenthood etc)*
- ❖ *residential- and school environment*

SES has large distribution effects on some schools.



- Pupils with special needs $\approx 5\%$ extra ≈ 35 MEUR

Challenges



- **Segregation** - Admission regulations based on grades from compulsory school make top students gather together in popular upper secondary schools in the city. On the other hand, this system also brings freedom of choice for the individual.
- **Rapid growth of population / Baby boom** - Stockholm is growing by two busloads of people each day.
- **Teacher recruitment** – Aging work force, lack of interest for teaching as a profession.
- **Inclusion of pupils with special needs** - e.g. learning disabilities, neuropsychiatric diagnoses . Inclusion is promoted in the National Education Act.
- **School premises** – Locating and constructing school buildings.
- **School voucher system** - difficulties for school leaders to anticipate number of students and plan ahead.

- More and more newly arrived pupils / Integration
- Low student performance in PISA

Youth in Sweden



Photo: Pink Sherbet Photography

- Young people in Sweden are often very independent and teachers in school encourage them to critical thinking and to question received truths.
- Access to free education, student aid and possibly a housing allowance provide real opportunities to choose their own way in life. Many young people leave home early, perhaps to study in another city.