

Equal access to free education

The Swedish school system is tax-financed. It is regulated through the Education Act, which mandates ten years of school attendance for all children from the year they turn six.

Preschool

In Sweden, *förskola* (preschool) is provided by municipalities for children ages one to five. The amount of municipal subsidy for preschool attendance depends on the child's age and whether the parents work, study, are unemployed, or on parental leave for other children.

Swedish preschool emphasises the importance of play in a child's development, with a curriculum aiming to ensure children's individual needs and interests. Gender-aware education is increasingly common, striving to provide children with the same opportunities in life regardless of gender.

Compulsory schooling

Swedish compulsory schooling consists of three stages: *förskoleklass* ('preschool year'), *lågstadiet* (years 1–3), *mellanstadiet* (years 4–6)

and *högstadiet* (years 7–9). Children between ages 6 and 13 are also offered out-of-school care before and after school hours.

Compulsory education also includes *sameskolor* (Sami schools) for children of the indigenous Sami people, up to the age of 12 (sixth grade).

Upper secondary school

Gymnasium (upper secondary school or high school, years 10–12) is optional. There are eighteen regular national programmes of 3 years to choose from, six of which are preparatory for higher education such as university, and twelve that are vocational.

While entrance requirements vary between programmes, all of them demand students to have passing grades in Swedish, English and mathematics from their final year of compulsory schooling. ►

Swedish law grants all children the same access to education.



In 2021, around 86 per cent of Swedish ninth-year students qualified for one of the national programmes at upper secondary school.

For students who have failed to qualify for a national programme, there are four so-called introductory programmes to choose from. From these introductory programmes, students can then move on to a national programme if they choose.

In 2021, roughly 69 per cent of students received a leaving qualification from upper secondary school (diploma) within three years of studies.

Special needs schools

Special needs schools in Sweden – of which there are schools with both national and regional catchment areas – receive pupils who need an alternative to regular com-

pulsory schooling. There are, for instance, special schools for pupils with deafness or impaired hearing, pupils with severe speech and language disorders, and pupils with impaired vision in combination with other disabilities.

It is the parents who apply for their children to attend a special needs school. In Sweden's special needs schools, compulsory schooling stretches over 11 school years, including the preschool year. Pupils who attend these schools are deemed to need more time for their learning.

For upper secondary school education, there are currently five special needs schools in Sweden. Four of these are for pupils with severe functional impairments, and one is aimed at pupils with either deafness or impaired hearing, or with a severe speech and language disorder.



Photo: Lena Granefelt/Imagebank.sweden.se

In 2011, the Swedish Education Act was thoroughly revised, with the intent to improve student results.

The Swedish Education Act

In 2011, the Swedish Education Act was thoroughly revised, with higher formal employment requirements for teachers and staff.

The current Act has more focus on student and teacher health and safety than it did prior, with anti-bullying and safe work environment measures. The Act also allows students more freedom of choice of school than it did previously.

Sweden's current national curriculum also came into force in 2011. The curriculum, which applies to all forms of compulsory

education, came with new general goals, guidelines and syllabuses.

Mandatory national subject tests to assess student progress – which were already in place for years 3 and 9 – were added for year 6.

Grading system

The Swedish grading system was also updated in 2011, to a new grading scale with ▶

Government authorities

The National Agency for Education

The central administrative authority in charge of attaining the national goals set out by the Swedish government and parliament. Its framework includes the Education Act and the national curriculum, which specifies the minimum amount of time to be spent on each subject in compulsory school. This covers subjects that are deemed particularly important in life, such as Swedish, English, mathematics, science, social studies, religious studies, arts and crafts, physical education and health.

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools

Works to ensure that children, young people and adults – regardless of functional ability – have adequate conditions to fulfil their educational goals. The agency is tasked to nationally oversee the implementation of special needs support in regular schools and the education in special needs schools. It is ultimately responsible for making teaching material accessible in Sweden, and also oversees government funding related to accessibility.

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education

Analyses labour market demands for workforce education, decides what programmes are to be included in higher vocational education and allocates public funding to education providers. The agency also assesses and inspects the quality and results of this education.

The Sami School Board

The administrative agency for public Sami schools and their affiliated activities, which are governed by the Sami School Ordinance. For children up to the age of 12, there are a handful of Sami schools in Sweden. There is currently only one Sami upper secondary school in Sweden, located in Jokkmokk in the very north of the country.

The Ministry of Education and Research

Responsible for the government's education and research policies. The ministry works on issues including school performance, conditions for teachers and study financing.

six grades from A to F, where A to E are passing grades, and F represents a failing grade. The system is very similar to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the standard grading system for higher education in Europe. Since 2012, grades are assigned from year 6 in Sweden.

Professional certification

Since 2013, a certification as a teacher or preschool teacher is required in order to be permanently employed at a school in Sweden. Since 2015, a certification is also required for a teacher's right to set grades in the Swedish school system.

A certification requires a teaching degree, a preschool teaching degree or a recreation instructor degree.

For teachers with a foreign teaching degree, a sufficient level of proficiency in Swedish is also required. This proficiency must be equivalent to the required level for admittance to higher education (universities and university colleges) in Sweden, which corresponds to level C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale. In addition, you need to meet certain national requirements for skills that are important for working as a teacher or preschool teacher in the Swedish school system.



Photo: Sofia Sabel/imagebank sweden.se

Digital technology is widely integrated in Swedish schools.

IT – important to learning

Under the curriculum for compulsory education, schools are responsible for ensuring that every student attending compulsory school is able to use modern technology as a tool in searching for knowledge, communication, creativity and learning. There is a similar curriculum for upper secondary schools.

During the academic year ending in 2019 – the most recent school year before the Covid-19 pandemic – the percentage of students who used the internet at school for schoolwork was 93 per cent at *mellanstadiet* (years 4–6), 97 per cent at *högstadiet* (years 7–9), and 92 per cent at upper secondary school (years 10–12).

Did you know?

In Sweden, around 45 per cent of adults aged 25–64 have pursued further education after passing upper secondary school, and 29 per cent have studied at an institute of higher education for more than three years.

Sweden's education is mainly financed by municipal taxes, but there is also a general government grant linked to a special equalisation system to create equal conditions for all municipalities.

Sweden was the first country in the world to prohibit corporal punishment of children, in 1979. Since 2020, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is Swedish law.

Children's rights

The Swedish Education Act, along with the Swedish Discrimination Act, strives to protect children and students from discrimination and degrading treatment.

In essence, the headteachers of preschools, schools and adult education programmes are responsible for enforcing prohibitions against discrimination and degrading behaviour, and for promoting equal treatment.

In 2006, Sweden appointed its first Child and School Student Representative, who is tasked with providing information about the Discrimination Act, helping schools prevent bullying, overseeing schools' efforts and representing students who have been bullied. The representative is a part of the **Swedish Schools Inspectorate**, the government agency tasked with school inspections.

All students have access to school doctor, school nurse, psychologist and school welfare officer at no cost.



Photo: Maskou/Felice/imagebank sweden.se

The Swedish Education Act aims to prevent discrimination at school.



Photo: Kim Wendt/Rosan Bosch Studio

Vittra Södermalm in Stockholm is one of many independent schools in the Swedish capital. Independent schools attract more than a fourth of all Sweden's upper secondary students today.

Independent schools

The number of independent schools with public funding, *friskola* in Swedish, is growing in Sweden. Following a law change in the 1990s, parents and their children can choose among tuition-free schools, whether municipal or private.

Although private schools have been in existence for as long as there has been compulsory education in Sweden, they were not a widespread competitive alternative to municipal schools until the 1992 law provided them with public funding.

This kind of publicly funded non-municipal school is called *friskola* to differentiate it from tuition-based private schools (of which there are only a handful left in Sweden).

Same rules apply

In Sweden, independent schools must be approved by the Schools Inspectorate and follow the national curriculum and syllabuses, just like regular municipal schools.

During the 2020-2021 school year, independent schools attracted more than 17 per cent of all compulsory school students and over 35 per cent of all upper secondary school students.

History

1842 Compulsory elementary schooling is introduced in Sweden.

1950 Co-educational compulsory education is launched, with nine years of compulsory education.

1962 The school system gets its current name, *grundskola*. The first national school curriculum is established in Sweden.

1966 The Ministry of Education assumes responsibility for preschools.

1968 The Special Service Act is implemented, ensuring that all children are entitled to education by also including children with intellectual disabilities.

1992 Sweden's independent school reform is implemented, which means independent schools and municipal schools follow the same rules.

1994 Curricula are introduced that interpret the mission of Swedish schools in a radically different way. Changes include outlining educational responsibility, teaching methods, non-traditional teacher roles and teaching materials.

1997 Under the Swedish Education Act, all students in compulsory education are provided with free lunches.

1998 Preschools get their own national curriculum.

1998 Six-year-olds are given the opportunity to attend *förskoleklass* (preschool year) at school.

2006 The new Act Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment of Children and School Students is introduced.

2011 A raft of school reforms are introduced, including earlier grading and a new system of teacher education.

2013 Professional certification is required for school and preschool teachers on permanent contracts.

2015 Professional certification is required as authorisation for teachers to set grades.

Useful links

www.government.se

www.myh.se

www.sameskolstyrelsen.se

www.skolinspektionen.se

www.skolverket.se

www.spsm.se

Government Offices of Sweden

Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education

Sami School Board

Swedish Schools Inspectorate

National Agency for Education

National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools

Copyright. Published by the Swedish Institute. December 2021.

All content is protected by Swedish copyright law. The text may be reproduced, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast in any media with reference to sweden.se. However, no photographs or illustrations may be used.

The Swedish Institute (SI) is a public agency that promotes interest and trust in Sweden around the world. SI seeks to establish cooperation and lasting relations with other countries through strategic communication and exchange in the fields of culture, education, science and business. SI works closely with Swedish embassies and consulates.

Further information about Sweden: sweden.se, the Swedish embassy or consulate in your country, or the Swedish Institute, Box 9, SE-121 21 Johanneshov, Sweden. Phone: +46 8 453 78 00; e-mail: si@si.se
www.si.se www.sharingsweden.se

 Sweden
Sverige

 Swedish
Institute