

# COUNTRY NOTE ON TRANSITIONS

## Sweden

March 2016

(Revised July 2016)



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## Chapter 1: The transition system and its organisation

### 1.1 Policy context

1. In little more than a year's time, children in Sweden may experience two transitions between three school forms: preschool, the preschool class and compulsory school. Also, when starting in the preschool class, children begin to attend the recreation centre.<sup>1</sup> Ensuring a smooth transition between these school forms is a paramount consideration to the Swedish education system, especially in regards to children in need of special support.

2. This considered, both the curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 98 (revised 2010) and the curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the recreation centre (Lgr 11), which are legally binding documents, make a strong point of the need for co-operation between the ECEC-settings and compulsory school.

3. A prominent feature of the early stages of the Swedish education system is the preschool class, which constitutes a bridge between the preschool and compulsory school. Established in 1998, the preschool class is a voluntary form of school for the children but the municipalities are obliged to offer all six year olds a place for at least 525 hours during a school year. According to the Education Act (2010:800), the education should stimulate the development and learning of every child, while at the same time preparing them for continued schooling. During the school year 2014/15, 96 percent of all six year olds, 0,8 percent of all five year olds and 1,5 percent of all seven year olds were enrolled in a preschool class (NAE, 2015a).

4. According to research, the preschool class can be viewed as the result of decades of debate on the co-operation and integration between preschool and compulsory school (Ackesjö, 2014). This too is reflected in the underpinning government bill, which discusses the preschool class as a way to integrate the preschool and compulsory school and a base for a continued schooling (prop. 1997/98:6). Nevertheless, the role of the preschool class as a middle ground between the preschool and compulsory school has recently been the subject of much debate, stemming from an indistinct mission.

5. When addressing the role of the preschool class, research discusses different push-effects beginning with the preschool. With the revision of the curriculum for the preschool in 2010, the pedagogical mission of the preschool teachers was strengthened. Although much room is still left for play and care, the new curriculum puts more focus on children's' learning and preschool teachers' education in school oriented areas. The goals to strive for have developed, become

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<sup>1</sup> The recreation centre is a sort of out of school centre. According to the Education Act, the recreation centre completes the education in the preschool class and in school. It should stimulate the development and learning of the pupils as well as to offer them a meaningful free time and recreation. The recreation centre is comprised by the first and (when applicable) the second chapter of Lgr 11, that is fundamental values and tasks of the school and overall goals and guidelines. Since the first of July 2016, the recreation also has its own chapter in Lgr 11 where the purpose and the core content of the education are made clear. Pupils aged 6–12, whose parents are either working or studying, have the right to attend recreation centres when school is out. According to a national survey in 2012, pupils spend in general 17 hours per week in a recreation centre (NAE 2013b). In 2015, 84 % of all children aged 6–9 attended the recreation centre and 21 % of the 10–12 year olds (NAE 2015b). The centres are often located in the same building or close to the preschool class/compulsory school. For more information about the recreation centre please see section 4.4.

more and changed in character, especially in the section concerning development and learning. It is argued that this development indicates a rapprochement between the preschool and compulsory school and that a similar shift can be discerned in regards to the preschool class (Ackesjö, 2014).

6. While originally intended to soften the transition between the preschool and compulsory school, later policy documents on the preschool class seem to put less focus on integration aspirations. Instead, focus is put on teaching, learning and the preparatory mission of the preschool class (Ackesjö, 2014).

7. A research summary of the preschool class, presented by Ackesjö, establishes an ambiguous picture of the preschool class. A prominent view is that the preschool class is still seeking its identity in the borderland between preschool and compulsory school. Other, early evaluations, present the preschool class as having gone through a “schoolification”, while there are also studies that depict the operation of the preschool class as different from that of the preschool and compulsory school, and thus see an isolated school form. This view, that it has not always been easy to bring together the working methods and pedagogy of the preschool and compulsory school, is also asserted by the government (U2015/191/S).

8. The indistinct role of the preschool class can be related to its weak position in the curriculum (Lgr 11), which is pointed out in a recent report from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2015:03).<sup>2</sup> The preschool class is comprised by the first and, when applicable, the second chapter of the curriculum, i.e. fundamental values and tasks of the school and overall goals and guidelines. According to the report, these parts of the curriculum (i.e. the overall goals) may be difficult to put into practice in the preschool class as they are to be ensured on the pupil’s completion of the compulsory school. This may then result in variations in practices when it comes to the orientation and content of the preschool class, with the risk of undermining the principle of an equal education.

9. Given this background, the government has recently commissioned the Swedish National Agency for Education (NAE) to leave suggestions on changes in Lgr 11 (U2015/191/S). The purpose is to make clear the mission of both the preschool class and the recreation centre. The sections on transition and co-operation in both Lpfö 98 and Lgr 11 are also to be elucidated. The original intention with the preschool class should remain unchanged though, and still work as a bridge between the preschool and compulsory school. The suggestions of the Agency were presented in November 2015. In May 2016 the government decided on changes in Lgr 11 which came into effect on the 1 of July 2016. The changes entail two new chapters in Lgr 11, one for the preschool class and one for the recreation centre, where the purpose and the core content of the teaching in the respective activities are made clear. Also, the section on transition and co-operation has been revised in both Lgr 11 and Lpfö 98 as to emphasize the importance of sharing knowledge, experiences and information on the education between the different school forms and the recreation centre, in order to create continuity and progression in the development and learning of the children and the pupils.

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<sup>2</sup> The report from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate is based on a review of the operation of 20 preschool classes. Thus it is not intended to give a national picture of current conditions regarding the preschool class. Nevertheless, the Government Commission (U2015/191/S) asserts that the preschool class holds a weak position in Lgr 11.

10. Another recent debate on the preschool class concerns whether it should be mandatory, but remain a proper school form, or be replaced by a mandatory 10-year compulsory school with the starting age of six years. A commissioned report (SOU 2015:81) on the matter was presented to the government in September 2015, recommending that the preschool class should be made mandatory from the autumn of 2017. The proposition is currently being processed by the government.

## 1.2 Goals and purposes

11. As previously mentioned, it is a key value of the Swedish education system to ensure smooth transitions between ECEC and compulsory school. As the Swedish education system is highly decentralised, with the municipalities and independent education providers organising the education, this value is reflected in the curriculums which provide guidance on how to realize the transitions. The sections on transition and co-operation (2.5) from Lpfö 98 and Lgr 11 are quoted below. As these sections recently have been revised there is not yet any official English translation. The following is thus an unofficial translation made to convey the content of the sections.<sup>3</sup> Please note that the formulations regarding the responsibilities of the head of the preschool and the headteacher have not been revised (sections 2.7 and 2.8).

## 2.5 TRANSITION AND CO-OPERATION

In order to support the development and learning of the children from a long-term perspective, the preschool should co-operate in a confidential way with the preschool class, the school and the recreation centre. Before transitions, the concerned school forms and the recreation centre should exchange knowledge, experiences and information about the content in the education in order to create coherence, continuity and progression in the development and learning of the children. There should also be forms of co-operation that aim at preparing the children and their guardians before transitions from the preschool to the preschool class, the school and the recreation centre.

Guidelines: Preschool teachers are responsible for

- in co-operation with teachers in the preschool class, the school and the recreation centre, exchanging knowledge and experiences as well as information about the content in the education in order to create coherence, continuity and progression in the development and learning of the children, and
- before transitions especially pay attention to children in need of special support in their development.

The work team should

- in co-operation with teachers in the preschool class, the school and the recreation centre prepare the children and their guardians before transitions.

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<sup>3</sup> Following references to the sections on co-operation and transition and to the new chapters on the preschool class and the recreation centre that are done throughout the text are also unofficial translations.

## 2.7 RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEAD OF THE PRESCHOOL

The head of the preschool is responsible for the quality of the preschool, and within given constraints, has specific responsibility for:

- developing forms of co-operation with the preschool class, the school and the recreation centre, and that coordination takes place to create conditions for a shared view, in close and trusting co-operation.

*(Lpfö 98 [Revised 2016], unofficial translation)*

## 2.5 TRANSITION AND CO-OPERATION

In order to support the development and learning of the pupils from a long-term perspective, the preschool class, the recreation centre and the school should co-operate in a confidential way with each other and the preschool. Before transitions, the concerned school forms and the recreation centre should exchange knowledge, experiences and information about the content in the education in order to create coherence, continuity and progression in the development and learning of the pupils. The school should also co-operate with the upper secondary education that pupils will later attend. There should also be forms of co-operation that aim at preparing the pupils and their guardians before transitions.

Guidelines: The teacher should

- in co-operation with preschool teachers in the preschool, teachers in other concerned school forms and the recreation centre exchange knowledge and experiences as well as information about the content in the education in order to create coherence, continuity and progression in the development and learning of the pupils,
- in co-operation with the work team in the preschool, teachers in other concerned school forms and the recreation centre, prepare the pupils and their guardians before transitions,
- before transitions especially pay attention to pupils in need of extra adaptations or special support, and
- make use of possibilities of continuous co-operation on the teaching in the preschool class, the school and the recreation centre.

## 2.8 RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEADTEACHER

The headteacher is responsible for the results of the school and within given constraints, has special responsibility for ensuring that:

- forms of co-operation are developed between the preschool class, the school and recreation centres in order to support each pupil's all round development and learning,
- co-operation is established with the preschool to create the conditions for a shared view, and close and confidential co-operation.

*(Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the recreation centre 2011 [Revised 2016], unofficial translation)*

12. Concerning equity it should be mentioned that, on a general level, the Education Act stipulates that the education provided in each school form and in the recreation centre should be equivalent, regardless of where in the country it is provided. Since 2014, the Education Act also states that municipalities shall allocate resources to the education within the school system according to the conditions and needs of the children and the pupils. More specifically, and in regards to transitions, it can be seen from the quoted passages that a certain emphasis is put on children and pupils in need of special support. In a support material on transitions from the NAE (2014a), this too is stressed. For example, it calls attention to the importance of finding forms for the transmission of information on these children when changing school form.

13. Promoting an equal education is an important concern to the government. For example, the NAE was tasked by the government in 2015 to develop an allocation formula, based on the current development regarding results and preconditions (U2015/03774/S). The allocation formula is to be used when deciding on the distribution of government grants that aim at increasing the equity between schools. Furthermore, the NAE has been commissioned to, in dialogue with education providers, direct efforts to schools with difficult conditions (U2015/3357/S). These efforts, however, do not focus on transitions, and only concern the compulsory school and upper secondary school.

### 1.3 Organisation of ECEC and primary education

14. In regards to the Swedish ECEC system, it has already been mentioned that the government is currently processing a proposal to make the preschool class mandatory. Concerning the compulsory school, it can be mentioned that the total number of instruction hours is to be defined for years 1–3, 4–6 and 7–9. This may affect the organisation of schools but not the length of the school day or the number of weeks in a school year (U2014/3489/S).

### 1.4 Distribution of responsibilities

15. As has already been pointed out, the Swedish education system is highly decentralised. The parliament and the government set out the goals and guidelines through the Education Act, different ordinances and national curriculums. The municipalities and independent education providers are responsible for organising the education within this framework. To make sure that the legislation and guidelines are implemented, there is the NAE and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, which supervises, supports, follows up and evaluates the school in order to improve quality and outcomes.

16. Needless to say, the education providers' responsibility for organising the education comprises the safeguarding of smooth transitions. As has been seen though, the curriculums require a high level of co-operation between ECEC-settings, compulsory school and the recreation centre, for which the preschool teachers, preschool heads, teachers and headteachers are responsible. The conditions for this co-operation may of course vary, depending on for example the number of preschools, preschool classes and compulsory schools being concerned by a transition.

17. On a general level, this co-operation is not free from dilemmas. A support material from the NAE on the preschool class (2014b) points out that according to research, it can be difficult to establish a good collaboration between the preschool class and compulsory school on account of different teacher categories not being given the time for exchanges on experiences, pedagogical discussions, planning, reflection, follow-up and evaluation. The report from the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, although not representative for the whole country, indicates on the other hand that preschool class teachers often form working teams with the teachers in the early years of compulsory school, but that there still is a lack of pedagogical co-operation between them, which may complicate the work with the progression of pupils (2015:03). According to the report, a part of the reason for the difficulties is that the pupils in the preschool class work towards overall curriculum goals (chapter 2 in Lgr 11), with no concrete goals for the preschool class activities, while there are concrete knowledge criteria for grades 1–3 in compulsory school. In regards to this assertion it can be noted that the preschool class is indeed comprised by, and its education should start out from, the fundamental values and tasks of the school as well as the overall goals and guidelines (when applicable) that are lined out in chapters 1 and 2 in Lgr 11. However, the new chapter on the preschool class in the curriculum works as a complement to these two chapters by making clear the purpose and the core content of the teaching in the preschool class, as well as how the teaching should give the pupils the conditions to develop in the direction of the knowledge criteria that will be put later on in compulsory school. 18. In order to facilitate the co-operation, the NAE provides suggestions in their support material on central guidelines on a strategic level (for education providers) and local action plans for individual preschools, preschool classes and compulsory schools to help facilitate the transitions (NAE, 2014a).

19. Concerning the allocating and managing of resources for education, it has already been mentioned that municipalities shall distribute resources to the education within the school system according to the conditions and needs of the children and the pupils. Furthermore, it is stated that the pedagogical work at school should be led and co-ordinated by a headteacher and, at preschool, by a preschool head. Being on a general level, this regulation applies to transitions as well.

20. The responsibility for setting out the regulations and standards for transitions between ECEC and compulsory school lies with the state. However, the education providers may freely organise the education within this framework, for instance in accordance with their local conditions.

21. The government holds the responsibility for curriculum development but is supported by the NAE. The NAE is responsible for curriculum assessment and, when tasked by the government – as was the case with the section on transition and co-operation and the new chapters on the preschool class and the recreation centre –, outlines proposals on changes in the curriculums.

22. The government also holds the responsibility for designing initial teacher training education, while it is the universities and university colleges that are responsible for providing the education. In 2011 four new teacher training programmes were introduced: Preschool teacher programme, Compulsory teacher programme, Subject teacher programme and Vocational teacher programme. One of the purposes with the reform was, aside from strengthening the quality of the teacher training education, to replace an educational structure that was difficult to

grasp with the four more distinct degrees. The preschool teacher degree is oriented towards work in the preschool. The compulsory teacher degree holds three orientations: towards work in the preschool class and grades 1–3 in the compulsory school, grades 4–6 in the compulsory school or work in the recreation centre. The subject teacher degree holds two orientations: towards work either in grades 7–9 in the compulsory school or upper secondary school. Concurrently, a teacher registration reform was implemented by the government. The reform means that only registered teachers (i.e. qualified) are allowed to teach and to set grades. From the Education Act it is clear that it is the education provider who has the ultimate responsibility for the teachers' professional development: 'The education provider shall see that the staff at preschools and schools is given the possibilities of in-service training. The education provider shall see that the preschool teachers, teachers and other staff at schools and preschools have the necessary insight into the regulations which apply for the school system'. Nevertheless, in later years the state has made two big investments in teachers' further education through the Teacher Boost 1 and 2 (MoER, 2014). The Teacher Boost 1 was in progress from 2007 until 2011. It then continued through the Teacher Boost 2 which will be running until 2018. Both of these professional development measures are set up by the NAE and arranged so that education providers can apply for state grants that will allow them to have their teachers take courses at universities and university colleges. The purpose of the Teacher Boost 1 was to strengthen the teachers' knowledge in their subjects as well as their subject didactics competence in order to improve the results of the school. The Teacher Boost 2 is aimed at giving registered teachers who lack qualification in a subject that he or she teaches, the possibility to take courses in that subject in order to become formally qualified.

23. Both headteachers and teachers have a responsibility to co-operate when transitions take place. There is no steering document that explicitly requires any one actor to develop strategies to support staff in ensuring successful transitions. Nevertheless, strategies on transitions may be developed on a central level, for example by a municipality. Such central guidelines may, in their turn, be put in concrete form in local action plans on transitions, developed by individual preschools, preschool classes and compulsory schools.

24. The preschool and the preschool class are non-mandatory school forms. According to the Education Act, the compulsory school attendance commence in the autumn term of the year when children reach the age of seven. If special reasons exist a child may, however, begin its first year in compulsory school one year later. The question of postponing the compulsory school attendance is to be tried by the home municipality at the request of the guardians of the child. Likewise, a child may begin to fulfil its compulsory school attendance the autumn term of the year when the child reaches the age of six, if this is demanded of the home municipality by the guardians.

25. The preschool and the preschool class are open for all children, including children with learning disabilities. Concerning transitions, compulsory education for pupils with learning disabilities is an alternative to compulsory school for pupils who are assessed as unable to reach the compulsory school's knowledge requirement because of a developmental disorder.

26. It is the responsibility of the municipality to try whether a child should be received in compulsory education for pupils with learning disabilities. Such a

decision shall be preceded by an investigation, comprising a pedagogical, psychological, medical and social assessment. The investigation shall be conducted in consultation with the guardians of the child. In the preschool class, such an investigation may come into question. In some cases, six year olds stay in preschool. The process of a possible reception in compulsory education for pupils with learning disabilities must then start already in preschool (NAE, 2013a).

27. Equity constitutes a corner stone of the Swedish education system and according to the Education Act, all children and pupils should be provided with support and stimulation, so that they can develop to the best of their abilities, regardless of their background or the school they attend. Given the decentralised organisation of the system, the responsibility for ensuring equity, for instance in regards to transitions, lies with the education providers. The NAE, being the central administrative authority for the school system, has of course an important mission in supporting the education providers in this. Furthermore, it can be mentioned that the NAE was tasked by the government in June 2015 to conduct systematic efforts in order to strengthen the education providers' ability to offer newly arrived pupils an education of high and equal quality (U2015/3356/S).

28. When it comes to larger changes and reforms, the government uses major consultations with the key stakeholders involved in setting school policy. A common practice is to refer proposals to the stakeholders for consideration. This practice has been a part of the Swedish policy making process for a long time with the main purpose of allowing the government to have illustrated the various possible consequences of a proposal. While government agencies are obliged to submit a statement to such referrals it is optional for others, municipalities for instance. The public is also free to come in with statements and so the practice can in this sense be seen as a way to foster citizen participation and strengthen the democracy. Statements are put together and taken into consideration by the government, but are not decisive to the outcome of the policy making process.

### 1.5 Monitoring transitions

29. On a national level, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate conducts regular supervision of all municipal and independent schools, from preschool to adult education. (Supervision of independent preschools is the responsibility of the municipalities.) Activities are scrutinized on a number of points, transitions for example.

30. On an education provider level, the Education Act stipulates that every education provider within the school system shall systematically and continuously plan, follow up and develop the education. This systematic quality work is also to be conducted by every individual preschool and school, with the participation of teachers, preschool teachers, other staff and pupils. Children in the preschool, their guardians and guardians of pupils are to be offered to participate in the work as well. Therefore, the preschool head and the headteacher need to develop routines for how the staff can take care of ideas and experiences that the children and pupils express in different ways about the education. Ultimately, this is a question about giving the children and pupils good conditions for expressing their opinions in matters that concern them. The personal development dialogue entails good possibilities for taking care of the reflections and analyses that the children and the pupils do themselves or through their guardians. In the preschool, another way to

find out if the children are involved can be to observe how they show interest in, respond to and motivation for what the staff is planning and conducting. Furthermore, the preschool head and the headteacher need to have routines for how the guardians are to be given possibilities to participate in the systematic quality work and for follow-up and documentation of their participation. The viewpoints and proposals on possibilities of development from guardians can be taken care of by for example letting them answer questions about their influence in surveys, interviews or discussions (NAE 2012). Finally, it is the headteacher and preschool head that are responsible for conducting the systematic quality work in relation to the national goals, requirements and guidelines.

31. In this systematic quality work transitions are to be considered, although no specific monitoring cycle can be pointed out, nor what instruments that are commonly used. It can be mentioned, however, that the NAE provide a self-evaluation form for the transition between the preschool class and compulsory school (2014a). The form is to be filled out by both organisations, and headteachers are responsible for putting together the results. The form aims at establishing what has worked well and what needs to be developed, with the basis of questions regarding the co-operation with guardians, collaboration with involved actors, documentation on transitions, transition dialogues and the ability to meet the needs of the child/pupil. Furthermore, the form stresses the importance of observing children and pupils in need of special support.

32. It can also be mentioned that the NAE has developed a tool for self-evaluation, BRUK (Assessment, reflection, development, quality), based on the Education Act and the curriculms. BRUK is thought of as a tool for use in a working team for collegial learning where one sees what one does, why and what it leads to, linked to the steering documents. The tool can be used to start development processes or as a part in systematic quality work. BRUK is for all school forms. The tool builds directly upon the Education Act and the first overarching chapter of the curriculms, and is formulated as indicators and criteria to take a position on, and assess. The tool therefore gives support in developing the education and teaching when it comes to systematic quality work, norms, values, and influence, as well as the knowledge, development and learning of the children and pupils (MoER, 2014).

## **Chapter 2: Professional continuity**

### **2.1 Leadership**

33. Headteachers and preschool heads have a central role in the implementation of the educational mission and have the responsibility of seeing that the organisation reaches the required goals and follows the applicable laws and regulations. In terms of transitions, and as has been seen from the curriculums, both headteachers and preschool heads have a certain responsibility to see that forms of co-operation are developed between the different school forms.

34. As managers for preschool teachers, teachers and other staff, preschool heads and headteachers are also responsible for leading and coaching the staff. This applies to the whole operation, including transitions, but in what ways, and to what extent, preschool heads and headteachers support staff in transitions and take part in them themselves cannot be indicated. It can be added though that preschool heads and headteachers are responsible for developing their operations, for example in regards to transitions, in accordance with the outcomes from the systematic quality work.

### **2.2 Staff support for transitions**

35. As previously mentioned, the NAE has produced a support material on the preschool class which, among other things, touches on the transition to compulsory school (NAE, 2014b), and one on transitions between school forms (NAE, 2014a). These material resources are not mandatory to use.

36. When it comes to transitions, special attention is to be given children and pupils in need of special support. To ensure smooth transitions for these children and pupils, additional staff may be used. Teachers for special needs education may for example play a vital role as transition coordinators, supporting and guiding staff in the receiving operation. The pupil health care may also play an important role in handling contacts with medical or social services. The pupil health care comprises, among other school forms, the preschool class and compulsory school. Collaboration between the preschool and the pupil health care may, nevertheless, take place (NAE, 2014a).

### **2.3 Collaboration between authorities and ECEC/primary school on professional continuity**

37. As mentioned under section 1.4, education providers have the responsibility to see that the staff at preschools and schools is given the possibilities of in-service training. They shall also see that the preschool teachers, teachers and other staff at schools and preschools have the necessary insight into the regulations which apply for the school system. While this may be related to transitions, it cannot be indicated what possible forms of collaborations such in-service training may involve, nor any common or recommended practices. And while local authorities may very well collaborate with ECEC settings and primary school on topics regarding transitions, no information can be indicated as to what extent and in which way this takes place.

## Chapter 3: Pedagogical continuity

### 3.1 Curriculum framework and development goals

38. The curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 98 and the curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the recreation centre 2011 (Lgr 11) are very much aligned when it comes to transition and co-operation, learning subjects and especially in terms of fundamental values. Nevertheless, while the preschool has goals for development and learning, compulsory school has goals for knowledge. Furthermore, for each subject in the compulsory school, core contents and knowledge requirements are specified (for years 1–3, 4–6 and 7–9).

39. The preschool class, which constitutes a transition year, is comprised by the first and (when applicable) the second chapter of Lgr 11, i.e. fundamental values and tasks of the school and overall goals and guidelines. Since the 1 of July 2016 the preschool class also has its own chapter in the curriculum. As mentioned under section 1.4, this chapter complements the first two chapters in Lgr 11 by making clear the purpose and the core content of the teaching in the preschool class, as well as how the teaching should give the pupils the conditions to develop in the direction of the knowledge criteria that will be put later on in compulsory school. The preschool class should still function as a bridge between the preschool and compulsory school and for example, the new chapter states that in the teaching, the pupils should be offered a variety of working methods, expressions and teaching environments that promote the transition from preschool to compulsory school and recreation centres. In that way the teaching in the preschool class should contribute to continuity and progression in the development and learning of the pupils as well as prepare them for continued schooling. The core content of the teaching comprises the following five areas: Language and communication, Creativity and aesthetic expressions, Mathematical reasoning and expressions, Nature, technology and civics and Playing, physical activities and activities in outdoor settings.

40. Great importance is given to language learning in both Lpfö 98 and Lgr 11. As one of several tasks of the preschool, Lpfö 98 states that: “Language and learning are inseparably linked together, as are language and the development of a personal identity. The preschool should put great emphasis on stimulating each child’s language development, and encourage and take advantage of the child’s curiosity and interest in the written language. Children with a foreign background who develop their mother tongue create better opportunities for learning Swedish, and developing their knowledge in other areas. The Education Act stipulates that the preschool should help to ensure that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish, receive the opportunity to develop both their Swedish language and their mother tongue”.

41. An equivalent section is to be found in Lgr 11 (Fundamental values and tasks of the school), stating the following as one of the tasks of the school : “Language, learning, and the development of a personal identity are all closely related. By providing a wealth of opportunities for discussion, reading and writing, all pupils should be able to develop their ability to communicate and thus enhance confidence in their own language abilities”. This is still applicable to the preschool class but has also, as a way of making clear the purpose and content of the teaching in the preschool class, become more elaborate in the new chapter. Thus it is stated that the teaching should take care of the curiosity of the pupils and give them

opportunities to develop their interest in and capability of communication through oral and written language by giving them opportunities to read, listen to as well as write and discuss about both fiction and other types of texts and events. Also, the teaching should in the everyday activities create in different ways possibilities for pupils with a mother tongue other than Swedish to use both Swedish and their mother tongue.

Regarding the core content for the area of language and communication, it contains the following that should be comprised by the teaching.

- Discuss, listen, ask questions and present own thoughts, opinions and arguments on different areas that are familiar to the pupils, for example ethical questions and everyday events.
- Discuss content and messages in different types of text.
- Narrative text, non-literary prose and text that combine words, images and sound.
- Letters and other symbols to convey messages.
- Rhymes, strings of words and other plays on words.
- Digital tools and medias for communication.
- Safe and responsible communication, also in a digital context.
- Words and terms that express needs, feelings, knowledge and opinions.  
How words and affirmations can be perceived and effect oneself and others.

The specification of the core content (which is done for all said five areas) facilitates how the teaching in the preschool class should give the pupils the conditions to develop in the direction of the knowledge criteria that will be put later on in compulsory school. The new chapter on the preschool class is thus aligned with the other parts of Lgr 11.

42. Education providers are free to organise the education within the framework given by the curriculums. There is, in other words, a large flexibility for adaption to individual and local needs. As the preschool class previously had a somewhat indistinct role in Lgr 11, this meant that there were significant differences around the country in how it was run (MoER, 2014). This, in its turn, risked undermining the principle of an equal education. The need for making clear the purpose of and the content in the preschool class was indicated as an important reason when the government commissioned the NAE to leave suggestions on changes in Lgr 11. The effects of these changes can however not yet be indicated as they came into effect on the 1 of July 2016 and the implementation work, with the NAE producing a support/commentary material for the new chapter, is still underway.

### 3.2 Pedagogy

43. In the steering documents of the Swedish school system, no explicit pedagogical approach is indicated for the last year in ECEC (the preschool class) or the final year of compulsory school. Although no main pedagogical approach can be pointed out, nor any underpinning main idea, theory or ideology, the Education Act clearly states that education within the school system shall have as its aim that children and pupils shall acquire and develop knowledge and values. It shall promote the development and learning of all children as well as foster a lifelong lust for learning. The education shall communicate and entrench respect for human rights and the basic democratic values upon which Swedish society rests.

44. There are some important formal differences between the preschool class and compulsory school, for example that the former is optional while the latter is mandatory. As previously mentioned though, a commissioned report (SOU 2015:81) recently suggested that the preschool class should be made mandatory. Another formal difference is that the compulsory school is comprised by the fifth chapter of Lgr 11, that is the syllabi. They contain the purpose of the subject and the core content for school years 1–3, 4–6 and 7–9. The syllabi are supplemented with knowledge requirements for the different grade levels at the end of school years 6 and 9 plus knowledge requirement for acceptable knowledge at the end of school year 3 (which is also guiding for the teaching in grades 1 and 2). Nevertheless, now that the preschool class has its own chapter in Lgr 11, making clear the purpose and the core content of the teaching, this formal difference is less important when comparing the preschool class with the first grade in compulsory school. One clear difference however is that from the fall of 2016 knowledge requirements will be introduced in grade 1 in the compulsory school for literacy. And for the education providers, assessment support will be mandatory to use from grade 1 in reading and writing development and mathematics. Regarding similarities, it can be noted that it is common that the preschool class and compulsory school are provided in the same setting or grounds. And just as play is important in the preschool class it is too in the early years of schooling in helping pupils to acquire knowledge.

### 3.3 Child development

45. No specific child development monitoring tools are set out in the steering documents for the preschool class, and practices may thus vary. However, the Education Act stipulates that, concerning the preschool class, at least once every school year the teacher, pupil and the guardians of the pupil shall have a personal development dialogue regarding the development and learning of the pupil.

46. When conducting systematic quality work in the preschool class, as has been mentioned, both pupils and parents participate together with teachers and other staff. For more information on collaborations with parents, please see section 4.2.

47. Chapter 3 in the Education Act contains basic provisions on special support, applicable to the preschool class as well as compulsory school. Among other things, all pupils should be given support and encouragement to develop as far as possible and staffs are required to report to the headteacher if it can be anticipated that a pupil will not achieve the minimum proficiency requirements. In such cases the needs of the pupil shall be speedily examined, and if needed, an individual action plan be drawn up for the pupil. Given the organisation of the school system,

it is the municipalities and independent education providers who are responsible for observing and implementing these rules. The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools is responsible for the state's overall support for the special needs of children, young people, and adults with disabilities. The function of the Agency is to offer support to school management in matters relating to special needs education, promote access to teaching materials, run special needs schools, and allocate government funding to pupils with learning disabilities and to education providers.

#### 3.4 Collaboration between authorities and ECEC/primary school on pedagogical continuity

48. As the central administrative authority for the Swedish school system, the NAE plays an important role in supporting the education providers on matters such as pedagogical continuity.

49. The NAE supports, follows up and evaluates the work of municipalities, independent providers and schools. In relation to national goals and steering documents, NAE establishes frameworks and guidelines for how education is to be conducted and assessed using goal documents, syllabi, tests, grading criteria, and general guidelines. NAE is responsible for national school development on a system level, that is, supporting preschools and schools in their development, mainly by publishing materials and administrating government grants. The Agency also organises training programmes for school-leaders and teachers, manages the registration of teachers and preschool teachers and hosts the Teachers Disciplinary Board. NAE evaluates activities within the school system through in-depth studies and provides analyses to highlight areas requiring attention on a national basis. Finally, NAE follows up the prerequisites of the different activities, how they are conducted, and how the results appear, by the continual collection of data from municipalities (MoER, 2014). As mentioned under section 1.4, the government holds the responsibility for curriculum development but is supported in this by the NAE. Steering documents, such as the curriculums, are not to be changed on a regional or local level but the NAE often consult the stakeholders when they are to decide on or conduct a major change in, for example, the curriculums. This can be done in various ways, e.g. focus groups, surveys, conferences etc.

## Chapter 4: Developmental continuity

### 4.1 Collaborations with the child

50. The curriculums stress the importance of co-operation aimed at preparing the children and pupils, and their guardians, before transitions, but indicate no specific practices. Nevertheless, in the example of a local action plan for the transition between the preschool class and compulsory school, provided by the NAE, a number of possible activities are listed (NAE, 2014a). The action plan is designed as a transition cycle that indicates point of time, activity and responsibility.

Month	Activity	Responsibility
March/April	Development dialogue in the preschool class, bringing up the transition.	Preschool teacher
April	Transition conference: staff from the preschool class, recreation centre, school year one and teacher for special needs education. Focus on abilities, knowledge development and need for support.  A re-division of the classes is done if necessary.	Headteacher
April	Information to the guardians through mail or meeting before school year one, about for example new teachers and possibly new leisure-time pedagogues.	Headteacher
May	Transition dialogue with guardians of pupils in need of special support.	Teacher for special needs education
May	Visit to the preschool class by the receiving compulsory school teachers.	Preschool teachers and compulsory school teachers
May	The six year olds have activities with the future school year one teachers.	Preschool teachers and compulsory school teachers
August	Two days of acclimatization at school with pupils, and acclimatization at school dialogue with guardians.	Teacher
September / October	Parent-teacher meeting in school year one. Information about content and working methods.	Teacher

September / October	Follow-up meeting with guardians of children in need of extra adaptations or special support.	Teacher for special needs education
November	The work on transitions is evaluated and, if necessary, revised.	Headteacher

51. In the examples of preparatory activities listed above, pupils are very much involved. To what extent the pupils' views on the preparation for compulsory school is taken into account cannot be indicated. However, and on a general level, the Education Act stipulates that in all education the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. The views of the child shall be mapped out as far as possible. Children shall have the possibility to freely express their opinions in all matters that concern them. The opinions of the child shall be attached importance in relation to the age and maturity of the child. This comes into practice in the systematic quality work (see section 1.5) that education providers as well as individual schools are to conduct, and the views of the children are important when following-up and developing the education, for example in regards to transitions.

#### 4.2 Collaborations with the home environment

52. The new sections on transition and co-operation in both Lpfö 98 and Lgr 11 clearly stress the importance of preparing guardians before transitions but, as mentioned above, indicate no specific practices. Nevertheless, the activities listed above serves as examples of how guardians may be involved in the transition from the preschool class to compulsory school. The personal development dialogue, required by the Education Act, is also an occasion for parents' involvement.

53. On a general level, the Education Act regulates that guardians of children in the preschool, preschool class, compulsory school and other school forms, shall be offered the possibility of influence on the education. Furthermore, in every preschool and school, there shall be one or several forums for consultation with the children, pupils and guardians, where matters of importance to the operation and to the children, pupils and guardians are to be treated.

54. The relation between school and home is also treated in section 2.4 of Lgr 11. According to the curriculum, the joint responsibility of the school, parents and guardians for the pupils' schooling should create the best possible conditions for the development and learning of children and youth. Furthermore, the curriculum provides guidelines, stating that all who work in the school should work together with the pupils' parents and guardians to jointly develop both the content and activities of the school. Teachers should work together with and continuously inform parents about the pupil's school situation, well-being and acquisition of knowledge, and keep themselves informed about the individual pupil's personal situation and show respect for the pupil's integrity.

55. Lgr 11 also indicates that the headteacher has a special responsibility for ensuring that contacts are established between the school and the home in the event the pupil experiences problems and difficulties at school. The headteacher is also

responsible for ensuring that structures for co-operation between the school and the home are developed, and parents receive information on the school's goals, working methods and different choice alternatives.

#### 4.3 Collaborations at setting level

56. Lpfö 98 and Lgr 11 stress the importance of co-operation between the different school forms in order to facilitate transitions. Preschool teachers, teachers, preschool heads and headteachers have a responsibility for this. Given that the Swedish school system is highly decentralised and allows for local variations, it cannot be indicated how different settings commonly organise collaborations to ensure good transitions. Possible examples of collaboration could be that the preschool class visits the compulsory school, pupils in the preschool class being assigned "buddies" in compulsory school or teachers from compulsory school attending parents' meetings in the preschool class.

#### 4.4 Collaborations with early childhood services and other settings, agencies or organisations

57. When children start in the preschool class they also begin to attend the recreation centre. The recreation centre is a part of the school system and the aim is to complement the education in the preschool class and in school. The centres shall stimulate development and learning as well as give a meaningful free time and recreation. It can be noted that the teaching in the recreation centre should start out from chapters 1 and 2 (when applicable) in Lgr 11. However, the recreation now too has its own chapter in the curriculum, which complements chapters 1 and 2 by making clear the purpose and the core content of the teaching. Among other things, the chapter indicates that the teaching in the recreation centre completes the preschool class and the school by a learning that to a higher extent should be guided by situations, be based on experiences and group oriented. It should also start out from the needs, interests and initiatives of the pupils. A simple example of this could be that mathematical terms and reasoning, being taught in the preschool class, can be put to practice through an activity such as baking in the recreation centre.

As seen in the new sections on transition and co-operation in Lpfö 98 and Lgr 11, preschool teachers in the preschool, teachers in the preschool class and the school should co-operate with each other as well as with the recreation centre by exchanging knowledge, experiences and information about the content in the education in order to create coherence, continuity and progression in the development and learning of the pupils.

Such reciprocal exchange between the pedagogical approaches of the preschool, the preschool class, the school and the recreation centre can help to enrich the pupils' development and learning. Recreation centres are thus involved in ensuring a good start in compulsory school. As mentioned in section 2.2, the pupil health care and teachers for special needs education can also help facilitate transitions for children in need of extra adaptations or special support.

## Chapter 5: Challenges and strategies

### 5.1 Main challenges

58. Given that the Swedish education system is highly decentralised it is difficult to point out specific challenges on an education provider level. There are, however, some general transition challenges that can be mentioned. As indicated under section 1.1. Policy context, the preschool class can be viewed as the result of decades of debate on the co-operation and integration between preschool and compulsory school. When originally designed, the preschool class was thought to function as a bridge between the two school forms, and this is still the case. Nevertheless, and has been seen, it has not always been easy to bring together the working methods and pedagogy of the preschool and compulsory school. This, in its turn, has led to differences around the country in how preschool classes are run, varying from being a separate preschool to being fully integrated into the compulsory school. Also, as both the NAE and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate have pointed out, the co-operation between the preschool class and compulsory school has not been free from dilemmas.

59. To meet these challenges, the government has initiated and also decided on changes in the curriculums. The section on transition and co-operation has been elucidated in both Lpfö 98 and Lgr 11. Also, two new chapters have been introduced in Lgr 11, making clear the purpose and the core content of the teaching in both the preschool class and the recreation centre. The changes came into effect on the 1 of July 2016 and the NAE is currently working on a support/commentary material in order to facilitate the implementation of these changes. What the effects of the curriculum changes will be is, however, too early to say.

60. Finally, regarding the education for six year olds, a commissioned report (SOU 2015:81) has recently proposed that the preschool class shall be made mandatory, but remain as a separate school form, from the autumn of 2017. This proposal is currently being processed by the government.

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