

Sweden

Introduction

1. This note outlines how functions within the schooling system in Sweden are organised. Relevant contextual information is also provided to assist understanding of the nature of the Swedish system and to provide insights into how system design may have contributed to the decline in Sweden's achievement, as measured by its performance in PISA.

Overall context

Structure of Schooling

2. From the beginning of the 2018/19 school year, the compulsory school starting age in Sweden will be six, rather than seven. Since 1998, municipalities have been obliged to provide a pre-school class for six year olds and from August of this year attendance in this class becomes compulsory. The pre-school class is usually integrated into compulsory schools and its curriculum is incorporated into the compulsory school curriculum.
3. In addition to the pre-school class, compulsory schooling covers years one to nine, and is divided into three stages¹. This is followed by three years of upper secondary education for students aged 16 to 19.² At the end of compulsory schooling students receive a compulsory school leaving certificate which records their final grades reflecting what they have achieved at the end of year nine in subjects, groups of subjects and optional courses.
4. Students who have successfully completed compulsory schooling follow one of 18 national programmes at the upper secondary level. Six of these programmes are preparatory programmes for higher education, each with a different area of specialisation, for example the arts or sciences.³ A further 12 programmes are vocationally orientated, each specialising in a different area.⁴
5. The requirements for entry into these programmes was strengthened in 2011. Students must achieve pass grades in 12 subjects (including mathematics, Swedish or Swedish as a second language, and English) for entry to higher education preparatory programmes. Entry into vocational programmes requires pass grades in eight subjects (also including the three core subjects).⁵
6. All 18 programmes include the study of eight foundation subjects but the breadth and depth of study differs between higher education and vocational programmes.⁶ Generally individual upper secondary schools provide both higher education

¹ Years 1 to 3, years 4 to 6, and years 7 to 9.

² The nine year programme for compulsory schooling was introduced in 1962. Between 1964 and 1970 there was a separate two year programme of vocational education at the upper secondary level, but this has since been abandoned.

³ The Art, Music and Drama Programme; the Humanities Programme; the Business Management and Economics Programme; the Social Sciences Programme; the National Sciences Programme; the Technology Programme.

⁴ The Child Care and Recreation Programme; the Construction and Installation Programme; the Electrical and Energy Programme; the Business and Administration Programme; the Handicraft Programme; the Hotel and Tourism Programme, the Industry and Engineering Programme; the HVAC and Property Maintenance Programme, the Restaurant and Food Programme; the Natural Resources Programme; and the Care and Treatment Programme.

⁵ Previously students only required pass grades in mathematics, Swedish (or Swedish as a second language) and English.

⁶ Physical education and health; Swedish (or Swedish as a second language), English, History, Social studies, Religion, Mathematics and Science studies.

preparatory and vocational programmes, but my not offer the full 18 programmes.⁷ In 2014, approximately 88 percent of upper secondary students received a leaving qualification related to the national level programmes. The leaving qualification is internally assessed.

7. Students who have not successfully completed compulsory schooling follow one of five introductory programmes aimed at making them eligible for a national upper secondary programme or preparing them to directly enter the workforce. In 2014, 13 percent of Swedish year 9 students did not qualify for entry into national upper secondary programmes.

Overall size and structure of the system

8. The Swedish school system is about twice the size of New Zealand. In 2018 the total population of Sweden is 10 million. In 2012/13 total school enrolments were some 1.25 million students, spread across 6,140 schools.⁸
9. At the compulsory level, schools are generally structured as separate primary schools (preschool class to years five or six) and middle schools (from years six/seven to year nine). However, increasingly municipalities are moving to a single school incorporating the pre-school class and all compulsory years of schooling. This is seen as supporting greater integration between stages of education and a single overall approach to compulsory education. Generally upper secondary education occurs in a separate school.
10. The extent to which specialist subject teachers are used at the compulsory school level varies, with this a decision taken by individual schools. However, it is common during the first three to seven years of schooling for students to be taught by class teachers, supported by specialist teachers in some areas, including for sport and languages. Subject teachers are more common in years seven to nine.

Grant-aided independent schools

11. Grant-aided independent schools are a feature of the Swedish school system. In the early 1990s, the regulatory framework was changed to make it easier to establish independent schools and these schools now receive funding equivalent to municipal schools. This change occurred at the same time as the decentralisation of responsibility for public school provision to municipalities, and changes that allowed parents greater choice in the municipal school their child attends.
12. Municipalities are required to fund students attending independent schools at a level equivalent to the per-student funding they provide to municipal schools. Both not-for-profit and for-profit independent schools are allowed. Grant-aided independent schools are not allowed to charge fees and over time there has been increased alignment of the regulatory framework for municipal and grant-aided independent schools.
13. In 2015/16, 14.8 percent of students in compulsory schooling attended grant-aided independent schools, and 25.9 percent of students in upper secondary schools.⁹ In 2012/13 there were 1,275 grant-aided independent schools. These schools accounted for 16 percent of compulsory level schools, and 39 percent of upper

⁷ Given demographic changes, especially in rural areas, a concern is the adequacy of the range of vocational programmes available to individual students in particular areas.

⁸ At this stage, I have not been able to access more recent data on the size of the school system.

⁹ OECD Education Policy Outlook Sweden 2017, www.oecd.org, accessed on 13 June 2018.

secondary schools. On average grant-aided independent schools are smaller than municipal schools, with this particularly the case for upper secondary schools.¹⁰

Diversity

14. The Swedish school system is becoming more ethnically diverse. In 2017, 18.5 percent of the Swedish population were foreign born, up from 11.3 percent in 2000 and, around a further five percent of the population have two migrant parents. Further, between 2003 and 2012, a significant share (20 percent) of permanent migrant flows to Sweden were on humanitarian grounds. Given recent migration and refugee issues in Europe, these trends are likely to have continued.
15. The OECD suggests that increased diversity does not explain the decline in Sweden's educational performance.¹¹

Achievement

16. In 2015, Sweden's performance in PISA on maths, reading and science was around the OECD average. In absolute and relative terms Sweden's mean score for all three subjects had materially declined in the period from 2000 to 2012, but particularly after 2006. As shown in Table 1, Sweden's performance in reading and maths improved in 2015, and performance in science stabilised.

Table 1: Sweden Mean PISA scores from 2000 to 2015

	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015
Reading	516	514	507	497	483	500
Mathematics	510	509	502	495	478	494
Science	512	506	503	494	485	493

17. There are indications over the last decade of growing inequalities in the distribution of learning outcomes in Sweden. The performance gap between students from socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds has increased, although, in 2015, the impact of socio-economic background on science performance of 15 year olds was similar to the OECD average. In science, the share of low performers has also increased over the last 10 years, from 16.4% in 2006 to 21.6% in 2015.
18. There is a material achievement gap between students from a migrant background¹² and other students.¹³
19. Boys and girls perform similarly in science and maths, but girls perform significantly better than boys in reading. The gap is greater than the OECD average, but has not increased since 2009.

System Structure

20. The national level government is responsible for steering the schooling system. It sets the overall policy framework, determines system goals and objectives, and

¹⁰ The average size of grant aided compulsory schools was 152 students compared to 189 for municipal schools. The average size of granted aided upper secondary schools was 189 students compared to 343 for municipal schools.

¹¹ OECD, *Improving Schools in Sweden: An OECD Perspective*, 2015, www.oecd.org, accessed on 14 June 2018.

¹² Defined as children born overseas or born in Sweden with two migrant parents.

¹³ In PISA science 2015, 50% of foreign born students and 33% of second generation students performed below the baseline in science, compared to 16.7% for native born students.

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monitors system performance. Municipalities are responsible for allocating resources, organising and operating municipal school services, ensuring schools have the necessary staff and that students achieve expected educational outcomes. Individual schools and school heads are responsible for the organisation of their school. Descriptors of the system, consistently reference management of the system by objectives.

National level organisations

21. At the national level, the Ministry of Education and Research has responsibility for overall policy and the framing of the schooling system. Responsibility for policy implementation now sits with four central administrative authorities, which work independently from the Ministry.
 - The Swedish National Education Agency. This agency is responsible for compulsory and upper secondary school education¹⁴. It puts forward proposals (to the Ministry), is responsible for developing steering documents, such as the curriculum and course syllabi, administers government funding, monitors system level performance and the quality of education outcomes in municipalities and grant aided independent schools, and is responsible for school improvement.
 - The Swedish School Inspectorate¹⁵. This agency supervises municipal and grant-aided independent schools by undertaking regular supervision 'inspections', as well as more in-depth quality audits relating to particular areas (e.g. instruction in mathematics). It has the power to impose sanctions, for example making an injunction specifying steps a school must take to rectify an identified deficiency, imposing a penalty or revoking the licence to operate of a grant aided independent school. It is also responsible for the licensing of grant aided independent schools.
 - The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools. This agency is responsible for allocating public funds for special pedagogical issues and provides support to schools on pedagogical issues related to disabilities.
 - The Swedish Centre for Educational Research. This agency was established in 2015 and is responsible for systematically compiling research related to education and disseminating this to teachers, head teachers and other stakeholders in the school system.

Municipalities

22. Municipalities are responsible for the provision of school education within their area and also for funding the schooling of students from their municipalities who attend grant-aided independent schools.
23. There are 290 municipalities in Sweden ranging in size from less than 10,000 residents to some 800,000 residents (Stockholm). As well as responsibility for the provision of school education, municipalities provide other social services.

¹⁴ It also has responsibilities for pre-school activities, school aged childcare, and municipal adult education.

¹⁵ It also includes the Child and School Representative, a legal expert appointed by the government, and responsible for investigating and making decisions relating to the offensive treatment of individual students. The Board of Appeal for Education is also connected to the Inspectorate. This is a court-like body that receives appeals from individual families and students relating, for example, to placement in particular teaching groups and admission into special schools, to upper secondary schools and Swedish language education for immigrants.

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24. In regard to public schooling, municipalities are responsible for decisions on the financing and organisation of municipal school provision, for monitoring their educational quality and outcomes, and for school improvement. The municipality establishes goals and priorities, and develops local level curricula in the context of national level goals and curriculum. Each local authority is required to establish a local plan for schooling.
25. At the municipal level school education is governed by the municipal assembly, which is required to have a municipal executive committee. Organisation below this level varies between municipalities, with this influenced by size. Most municipalities have a number of specialist committees responsible for specific areas of operation; e.g. an education committee. However, some municipalities, especially in larger cities, have district committees responsible for all operations, including schools, in a particular district.
26. Under the committee structure sits the central municipal administration, headed by a Chief Executive, who reports to the municipal executive committee and manages (directly or indirectly) all other municipal staff including the head of the 'department of education'. The head of the department of education reports to the committee responsible for education, and is responsible for principals (head teachers) within schools.
27. The general principles and objectives of schooling are decided at the municipal assembly level, while execution of duties is passed to the relevant committee and through to municipal staff.
28. Recent reviews have identified systematic weaknesses in the performance of municipalities. It is suggested that in the 1990s municipalities were not well equipped or prepared to take on the responsibility for schooling, and that support and steering from the national level was insufficient. As a result, municipalities have managed the responsibility for schooling in an ad hoc manner, and have not been able to drive a coherent vision for educational achievement through the different levels of the municipality and down to individual schools. This was exacerbated by capacity issues, which contributed to the failure to develop structures that sufficiently drew on local experts and to effectively use data to assess school quality and educational outcomes.
29. Further, funding arrangements mean that municipalities are able to make trade-offs between the resourcing provided to schooling and other municipal services, and as a result resourcing may not be well targeted to need.¹⁶

Individual municipal schools and the role of the principal

30. The principal of a municipal school is a civil servant appointed by the municipality. S/he is responsible for the internal organisation of the school, for development of teaching and learning programmes in the context of the national and municipal curriculum settings, for ensuring the quality of teaching and education outcomes, and for internal school self-review and quality improvement. The principal is both a pedagogical leader and manager of teachers and other staff. Responsibility for the school's internal organisation includes, financial management, personnel

¹⁶ Municipalities raise their own tax revenue as well as receiving central government funding. While central government funding for school education includes an 'equalisation component' taking account of factors such as smallness of population and socio-economic profile, most funding for schools is provided as part of a wider central government grant – i.e. it is not 'tagged' for school education. Changes to funding was one of the recommendations of the OECD in the 2015 report, *Improving Schools in Sweden: An OECD Perspective*.

management (including the determination of teachers' salaries¹⁷), and work organisation.

Parental participation in governance of the school system

31. In 1997, legislation provided for a five year pilot to enable municipalities to establish local boards with parental participation, and this was extended a number of times. It would appear that municipalities had flexibility to determine the scope of issues that might be addressed by such boards and the extent to which they were advisory or had decision making authority. These boards do not appear to be deeply embedded into the school system. Most reports reference the role of parents in terms of their engagement with teachers, choice in schooling, and the use of parental (and student surveys) as part of the arrangements for the evaluation of schools.

Curriculum and Assessment

Curriculum

32. The Education Act, and the curricula and associated syllabi are key national level steering documents within the Swedish system. The general goals of schooling are set out in the Education Act. The aims relate to students acquiring and developing knowledge and values, discovering their unique value as individuals and being able to participate fully in society. Schools are to promote the development and learning of all students and a lifelong desire for learning.
33. The curricula associated with the compulsory level of schooling were reformed and strengthened in 2011.¹⁸ Each is divided into three parts: fundamental values and tasks of the school; overall goals and guidelines for education; and syllabi which are supplemented by knowledge requirements. For compulsory level schools, the Swedish government (political level) determines all three parts of the curriculum, with the exception of the knowledge requirements which are established by the Swedish National Education Agency. The syllabi state the general orientation and core content of each subject, and at the compulsory level specify the goals for years three, five and nine. The knowledge requirements determine the acceptable knowledge and different grades. There also appears to be central direction of minimum teaching time on subjects at different stages of compulsory schooling. Changes are expected to be made to these allocations for the 2018 school year.
34. As part of the 2011 reforms, greater clarity was provided about knowledge requirements, and in parallel the grading system was changed to provide a more calibrated assessment of a student's knowledge and achievement.¹⁹ In 2015, the Swedish National Education Agency indicated that it was moving to more systematic review of the syllabi and knowledge requirements.

¹⁷ The OECD reports that salaries for teachers with minimum training are above the OECD average, and salaries for teachers with 10 to 15 years of experience and who are at the top of the scale are below the OECD average.

¹⁸ There are 4 separate curricula at the compulsory level: for compulsory schools, for compulsory schools for students with learning disabilities, for special schools and for Sami schools. The fundamental values and tasks of the schools are common across the curricula.

¹⁹ There are now six grades, one of which is a non-pass grade. Previously there were three grades; pass, pass with distinction and pass with special distinction.

Assessment

35. Assessment at all levels is fundamentally based on teacher judgement. In the early stages of schooling, assessment is primarily used for diagnostic and formative purposes. Students do not receive formal grades until year six²⁰.
36. There are compulsory national tests/assessments at the end of years three, six and nine, with these primarily relating to literacy and numeracy.²¹ While developed centrally, a key feature of these tests/assessments is that they are marked/graded by the student's teacher.
37. At years three and six the assessments are intended for diagnostic and formative purposes. At year nine the tests are summative, and inform the student's final grade in the relevant subject area.²²

Teacher Quality and School Leadership

Initial Teacher Education

38. Compared to some other countries the infrastructure supporting the quality of teachers and school leadership appears relatively undeveloped. The quality of teaching is also variable across the system.
39. Arrangements for initial teacher education were reformed in 2010. The single degree of Bachelor/Master of Education was replaced by four new professional degrees related to:
 - pre-school education,
 - primary school education with specialisations relating to years one to three, years four to six, and out of school care,
 - subject education with separate specialisations for years seven to nine, and upper secondary education,
 - vocational education.As part of the reform of initial teacher education, Sweden also strengthened induction arrangements for newly graduated teachers. New graduates now participate in a year-long programme of induction.
40. As of 2015, initial teacher education was provided by 28 separate institutions, each operating largely autonomously. The number of applicants to initial teacher education programmes is relatively low (although this has recently increased), and relatively low grades are required for entry into programmes.
41. In 2015, the OECD recommended that the capability, focus, and resources in existing initial teacher education and leadership education programmes be reviewed.

Teacher Registration

42. Sweden introduced a teacher registration system in 2011. This is administered by the Swedish National Education Agency, rather than a separate professional body. Teachers are now required to be certified to teach in particular school forms, stages of schooling and/or subjects.

²⁰ Prior to 2011, students received grades from year 8.

²¹ In year three the tests/assessments are in Swedish (or Swedish as a second language) and mathematics, in year six English is also assessed, and more recently science at year nine.

²² The teacher determines the balance given to the national assessment in a student's final grade.

43. In 2015, the Swedish National Education Agency reported that 20 percent of people who work as teachers do not have a teaching degree (and therefore cannot gain certification), and that a third of teachers at compulsory and upper secondary schools do not have authorisation for the subjects that they teach. Since the 2011 reforms, Sweden has invested in continuing professional development (Teacher Boost) to enable existing teachers to meet the requirements for certification.

Teacher appraisal and continuing professional development

44. Teacher appraisal is not well developed. While appraisal is required by law in order to determine teachers' remuneration, the process is not underpinned by professional teaching standards or centrally determined process requirements.
45. Traditionally the Swedish National Education Agency was responsible for making sure that a range of continuing professional development was available, and municipalities and independent school providers were responsible for ensuring that their teaching staff had appropriate training. More recently, the Swedish National Education Agency has taken a more active role in providing national level professional development to support system level objectives (for example, Maths Boost.) There has, however, been concern about uneven participation across the school system, especially by smaller municipalities and independent providers.

School leaders

46. Reports by the OECD and the Swedish School Inspectorate suggest that principals in Sweden may not be sufficiently focused on the pedagogical leadership of schools.
47. Since 2011, all newly appointed principals must participate in, and complete within four years, an advanced academic level school leadership programme. There are, however, questions around whether principals are sufficiently supported to develop in their leadership roles, and especially in their role in supporting school improvement. Indications are principals in Sweden are not taking part in networking, mentoring and research activities at the level of some other countries.
48. Sweden does not have the equivalent of an 'Institute of Education Leaders' (e.g. like Ontario).

Quality assurance and school improvement

49. In regard to municipal schools, the original expectation was the quality assurance would be provided through the responsibility of the principal for the teaching and learning programme within their school, and the role of municipalities in monitoring the performance and supporting the continuous improvement of their schools. Incentives for improved performance were also expected to be created through the impact of choice. As part of this approach, from the late 1990s municipalities and schools were required to publicly provide qualitative self-evaluation reports each year. This reporting requirement was removed in 2010, but not the expectation for self-review and monitoring of performance.²³
50. The focus of the national level was to monitor the performance of municipalities and independent schools, and overall system performance.

²³ In 2015, the OECD raised whether these reports should be re-instated.

51. Over time, the role of the national level in supporting quality assurance at the individual school and municipal level has expanded, with the introduction of national assessments/tests and of external school inspections. These arrangements also contribute to national level monitoring of system performance which is now based on international assessments (eg. PISA), aggregated data from national tests/assessments, thematic quality evaluations from the Swedish School Inspectorate and evaluations undertaken by the Swedish National Education Agency.
52. Public reporting of school level information provided through the quality assurance regime is a feature of the Swedish system.

Swedish School Inspectorate

53. The 'regular supervision' (external inspection) of municipal schools was introduced in 2003, with the regime strengthened with the formation of the Swedish School Inspectorate in 2008. Originally schools were subject to review once every six years, but this now occurs at three yearly intervals.
54. Documentation on the Inspectorate's website suggests that for many schools this supervision may not involve a site visit, but rather the review of school documentation. Twenty five percent of schools, identified on the basis of a risk analysis, are subject to closer inspection with this including a school visit.
55. The inspections follow nationally established standards relating to results, activities, and conditions in schools and the Inspectorate's reports are publicly available. In 2015, the OECD suggested that these standards were, however, less elaborated than in countries where inspection systems have been in place for a longer time. Separately, in 2013 the National Audit Office suggested that the Swedish Schools Inspectorate has difficulty assessing many of the factors that affect the quality of teaching in practice, and also raised issues around follow-up to support school improvement.
56. Overall the OECD has suggested that the Swedish School Inspectorate needs to shift the balance of its focus to give greater emphasis to supporting school improvement.²⁴

National Tests/Assessment

57. Mandatory assessments/tests in year nine in Swedish (Swedish as a second language), mathematics and English were introduced in the 1997/98 school year. The role of mandatory tests was expanded from 2009, with tests at year five (since replaced with tests at year six), the addition of science at year nine and the introduction of tests at year 3 in 2010²⁵.
58. As noted above, the student's teacher marks and grades compulsory national assessments. A key system weakness identified by the OECD in both 2011 and 2015, is teacher assessment literacy and particularly the consistency of teacher judgements in grading national assessments. (Curriculum changes in 2011 to provide greater clarity around expected knowledge and grading have not resolved this issue.)
59. This inconsistency in assessments, has ramifications for all elements of the quality assurance framework, given that the results from national assessments flow

²⁴ The National Education Agency has primary responsibility for school improvement.

²⁵ These now potentially support new initiatives focussed on early intervention.

through to school self-review, monitoring by municipalities, the work of the School Inspectorate and system level monitoring by the Swedish National Education Agency.

Monitoring by municipalities, school self-review and school improvement

60. There is evidenced that in practice monitoring by municipalities and school self-review has not been fully effective. The OECD suggests, that overall municipalities have not taken strong ownership for educational outcomes.²⁶ The extent to which individual municipalities monitor the performance of their schools has also varied widely. (Some larger municipalities have their own inspection process.) Concern is also expressed about whether chosen indicators of performance have always provided a sound basis for decision making and school improvement, including those developed by the national body for municipalities.
61. At the school level, issues include the priority that the principal is able to give educational leadership given his/her other responsibilities,²⁷ the assessment capability of teaching staff (with this determining the school's understanding of its educational outcomes), and the absence of a common framework of quality indicators as a guide for school improvement. The OECD views the link between teacher appraisal, teacher professional development and school improvement as under-developed in Sweden.

Recent developments

62. In 2015, a government commission²⁸ reported to Parliament with a proposal for the development of an evaluation and assessment framework.²⁹
63. Separately in 2015, the Swedish National Education Agency was expected to have in place an online national information system for all schools, which would gather a broader range of information and support better analysis, especially of differences in outcomes across schools and municipalities.

School Choice

64. School choice was a key element of the reforms to school education in the early 1990s. Parents have choice in relation to municipal schools as well as grant-aided independent schools. Students are first allocated to a municipal school based on geographical criteria. Parents and students can choose to stay in the assigned school, or chose another municipal school or a grant-aided independent school if places area available. In primary and middle schools, students are allocated to these schools on a 'first come, first serve basis'.
65. School choice has contributed to increased socio-economic segregation of the Swedish school system. At the same time there is also a high level of segregation of places of residence.
66. Sweden has been grappling with the question of the extent to which choice has contributed to lower and more unequal levels of achievement. In 2013, the

²⁶ For example, one OECD case study suggests that municipalities have 'cherry picked' between the national level objectives and have not seen national objectives as realistic – but rather aspirational.

²⁷ For example, in 2011 the Swedish School Inspectorate reported that of the schools visited in 2010, 62 percent of compulsory schools were assessed to have deficiencies when it came to the principal's responsibility for school results being regularly evaluated with the aim of improving the work of the school. Reported by the OECD, *Improving Schools in Sweden, An OECD Perspective*, 2015, www.oecd.org, accessed on 18 June 2018.

²⁸ Commissions and inquiries are a normal part of the policy development process in Sweden.

²⁹ I have not been able to access information (in English) which sets out the framework.

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Swedish National Education Agency indicated that it saw 'free school choice and the school market' as a true dilemma.³⁰ It noted that while it enabled parents to seek out schooling that might best suit their child's needs and possibly created incentives for school improvement, it simultaneously weakened the conditions to provide each student with equal education. In its 2015 review, the OECD recommended reviewing the design of choice policies to mitigate the impact of increased socio-economic segregation.

67. In 2015, the Swedish Government established a commission to investigate and make proposals in relation to the choice issue. It would appear that the Commission did not recommend the removal of choice. Reporting suggests that a key recommendation was to move to a ballot system for allocating students. (The 'first come, first serve' approach was seen as favouring more advantaged families, as they were more likely to plan ahead.) It does not appear that this recommendation has been taken forward, with opposition to the proposal at the time of the release of the commission's proposal.
68. Separately the commission recommended changes to funding arrangements for schools, with increased funding to mitigate the impact of socio-economic disadvantage. In 2015, in its assessment of the situation of the school system, the Swedish National Education Agency raised concerns about how municipalities were allocating funding, and in particular the failure to adequately take into account need. In 2017, the Swedish Government increased school funding to address socio-economic disadvantage.

Collaboration

69. Collaboration between teachers, and across schools and municipalities does not appear to be a strong feature of the Swedish school system. In 2013, the Swedish National Education Agency reported that teachers normally work alone, and that the system is not characterised by strong collaboration and collegial learning. More recently the Agency has been seeking to foster formalised professional structures that promote co-operation and collegial dialogue. This is a feature of professional development associated with the Maths Boost Programme.
70. Sweden also does not have in place some of the institutional structures that might support such collaborative learning – for example, a professional association for teachers or an institute of education leadership. The comparatively limited time principals are involved in mentoring, networking and research activities was also noted above.

Concluding Comment

71. The combination of decentralised provision along with considerable autonomy for municipalities and schools, choice and the role of grant-aided independent schools appears to have resulted in a very fragmented school system. The formal middle layer – municipalities – does not appear to have worked well, and in the reform process insufficient attention was given to the role of the national level in steering the system. The development of institutions and systems to enable national level steering has occurred more recently, and appears to be still a work in progress.

³⁰ Swedish National Education Agency, An Assessment of the Situation in Swedish Schools, (English Summary) 2013, www.skolverket.se, accessed on 22 June 2018.

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72. The risks in terms of the impact on student achievement are likely to have been exacerbated by the overall level of professional capability. Further, Sweden appears to have lacked a coherent vision, shared by all parts of the system, and deeply embedded professional practice and culture that might have supported a system-wide focus on improvement and the organic development of networks and practices that might have supported this.

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