



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Government Offices  
of Sweden

FACT SHEET

Ministry of Education and Research

U11.009 • June 2011

# Status and pedagogical task of preschool to be strengthened

On 1 July 2011, the new Education Act and amendments to the preschool curriculum will enter into force. Preschool will become an integral part of the school system, with the aim of consolidating its status as the first step of the education system and of enhancing its quality and equivalence. This means that several of the provisions in the introductory chapter of the Education Act that apply to all forms of school will also apply to preschool, including overall goals of education. The pedagogical task of preschool is also strengthened by a clearer curriculum that includes new goals for children's development in language and mathematics as well as in natural science and technology. In addition, the pedagogical responsibility of preschool teachers has been clarified and new sections on the responsibilities of preschool heads and on follow-up, evaluation and development have been added. To strengthen the teaching skills of preschool staff, the 'Boost for Preschool' in-service training initiative is being implemented during 2009–2011. In addition, a new preschool teacher education programme starts in autumn 2011 and a system of preschool teacher registration is to be fully introduced in autumn 2012.

## The new Education Act means that:

- Preschool becomes a distinct form of school.
- Common overall goals are set for all forms of schools.
- The same regulations apply to municipal and independent preschools.
- The concepts of 'teaching' and 'education' apply to preschool.
- New provisions on systematic work on quality are introduced.
- A new position of preschool head is introduced.
- The regulations concerning employment as a preschool teacher are made clearer.
- A new career path as senior preschool teacher is available.
- The curriculum applies to both municipal and independent preschools.
- Responsibility for the preschool environment is increased.
- Mother tongue support and personal development dialogues are regulated by law.

## The revised curriculum includes:

- Clearer goals for children's development in language and mathematics, and in natural sciences and technology.
- A clarification of the pedagogical responsibilities of preschool teachers.
- A new section on evaluation, follow-up and development.
- A new section on the responsibilities of preschool heads.

## Background

Today, preschool is a natural part of the daily lives of families with children and is a prerequisite for being able to combine parenting with work. Since the late 1990s, preschool has gone from being part of family policy to becoming the first step in a coordinated education system.

Through the introduction of a curriculum for preschool in 1998, the pedagogical task of preschool has been made clearer and its national goals have been more precisely defined. Over the past decade, the pedagogical task of Swedish preschools has become more important. This trend will continue and the pedagogical task of preschool, where care, development and learning form a coherent whole, remains in place.

On 22 June 2010, the Riksdag approved a new Education Act (Govt. Bill 2009/10:165) which will enter into force on 1 July 2011. At the same time, the revised curriculum for preschool, approved by the Government on 5 August 2010, will also enter into force.

## The new Education Act in brief

The new Education Act is, as far as possible, common to all forms of schools and to all school principal organisers. Preschool will now be a distinct form of school, and municipal and independent preschools will be part of the school system. This means that several of the overall provisions of the Act will also apply to preschool. For instance, the basic values for the entire school system are set out, as are regulations for measures to combat abusive treatment. With a clear link to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is made clear that the

best interests of the child are to form the basis of all education. The provisions relating to the background check of staff in the form of extracts from police records are transferred to the Education Act.

### The aim of preschool

The Education Act clarifies the aim of preschool, which is to stimulate children's development and learning in a secure and caring environment. Activities are to be based on a holistic view of the child and the child's needs. Preschool is also intended to promote a broad spectrum of contacts and a sense of community, and to prepare children for continued education.

Preschool supports families in their responsibility for children's development and learning. Cooperation with parents is therefore a defining feature. Preschool is for the child's own sake and is important for the child's all-round development. Together with the efforts of parents in the development and upbringing of children, preschool helps to lay the foundations for lifelong learning.

### Teaching and education

Preschool will be covered by the concept of 'teaching', which is defined as:

- those goal-oriented processes which, under the direction of preschool teachers, are aimed at development and learning through the acquisition and development of knowledge and values.

The concept of 'education' now also applies to preschool and is defined as:

- the activities within which teaching takes place based on defined goals.

The fact that preschool is covered by the concept of teaching does not change the task or activities of preschool, nor does it call into question the pedagogy or working methods that have been used within the preschool system for many years.

### Independent preschool

The municipality where the independent preschool is to operate is responsible for deciding on the issue of approval to start the preschool. The municipality will assess whether the principal organiser is able to comply with the provisions in force, including the ability of the preschool to work according to the provisions of the Education Act, and to the goals and guidelines of the curriculum. The municipality will also subsidise each child and supervise activities. An independent preschool may have confessional elements, for example morning prayers, whereas a municipal preschool must be non-confessional. The

participation of children in any confessional components must be voluntary.

### Systematic work on quality

Principal organisers and preschools are to conduct systematic work to improve quality and to plan and monitor activities on an ongoing basis, as well as improve activities in the preschool. The focus must be on achieving the national goals for preschool. Work on quality must be documented and implemented with the active participation of the staff. Children and their guardians are to be given the opportunity of participating in the preschool's work on quality.

If any shortcomings come to light as a result of monitoring, a complaint or in any other way, the principal organiser is to ensure that necessary measures are taken. Written procedures for receiving and investigating complaints are to be drawn up.

All preschools are to make systematic efforts regarding the influence of children, and guardians are to be offered the opportunity to exert influence. The preschool head is responsible for ensuring that there are several forums for consultation.

### Supervision

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate and the municipalities are given a clear legal basis for the supervision of municipal and independent preschools. Joint provisions on the powers of supervisory agencies are introduced in the Education Act, including a scale of sanctions where the ambition, as far as is possible, is to have the same sanctions for municipal and independent preschools. The possibility of combining an order with a conditional financial penalty is introduced. The responsibility for state evaluation and quality control is also established in the Act.

### Preschool head

A new position of preschool head is introduced, with the same qualification requirements as for school principals. The pedagogical activities at a preschool are to be led and coordinated by a preschool head, who is also to work for pedagogical development at the preschool. When the preschool is integrated or jointly organised with a school, the heads are to be known both as preschool head and principal. The preschool head decides on the internal organisation of his/her unit and otherwise makes the decisions and holds the responsibilities outlined in the Education Act and other statutes.

## Preschool staff

In every preschool, there must be preschool teachers who are responsible for teaching. Only registered preschool teachers will receive permanent employment as preschool teachers. People who are not registered may be employed as a preschool teacher for a maximum of one year at a time. In order to be registered as a preschool teacher, a degree in preschool education and the completion of an induction period lasting at least one school year (or equivalent in full-time) is required. The preschool teacher must also be deemed suitable to teach. A new preschool teacher education programme starts in autumn 2011. The degree in preschool education comprises 210 higher education credits (3,5 years) and the programme has a clear focus on work in preschools. Those who hold an older degree and have worked for at least one year may also be registered.

In addition to preschool teachers, it is also natural that other staff are employed on a permanent basis at preschools. These may include child minders, art, music and drama teachers, and people with mother tongues other than Swedish.

It is the responsibility of the principal organiser to decide which staff, besides preschool teachers, are to be employed at the preschool. Working teams are a characteristic form of cooperation at preschools. Everyone in the working team stimulates children's development and learning in a secure and caring environment.

The principal organiser is given responsibility for ensuring that preschool staff have the opportunity for continuing professional development. The principal organiser must also ensure that preschool teachers and other staff have the necessary understanding of the regulations that apply to preschool.

## Senior preschool teachers

Preschool teachers are to be given the opportunity to follow a career path leading to the position of senior preschool teacher. The research school initiative continues until 2014, which allows preschool teachers to undertake research in order to earn a licentiate degree, while retaining their salary. The aim is to strengthen research in the field of preschool education, and thus increase quality in preschools. A preschool teacher who has earned a licentiate or higher degree in a preschool-related area, and has demonstrated excellent teaching skills during a period of service lasting at least four years, may be appointed as senior preschool teacher.

## Children's groups and environment

The new Education Act also regulates that children's groups must be of an appropriate size and composition. A new feature is that children are also to be offered a good environment in other respects. The premises and equipment necessary to meet the aim of the activities must be available.

## Children in need of special support

Children who require special support for their development because of physical, psychological or other reasons are to be given the support demanded by their particular needs. If information from preschool staff, or other sources, suggests that a child is in need of special support, the new Education Act also regulates that the preschool head must ensure that the child be given such support. The child's guardians are to be given the opportunity to participate in the design of the specific support measures. Special support is to be provided in the manner, and to the extent, necessary for the child to be able to develop and learn in line with the curriculum.

## Mother tongue support

Support for preschool children with mother tongues other than Swedish is strengthened in the new Education Act. Preschool is to actively assist children with mother tongues other than Swedish in receiving the opportunity to develop both their command of the Swedish language and their mother tongues. The number of multilingual children is increasing and their specific circumstances should be taken into account. A fundamental responsibility of preschool is to give all children opportunities to utilise their resources in the best way. Supporting the language development of children, as well as cultural diversity, is therefore an important preschool responsibility.

## Personal development dialogues

Cooperation between the home and preschool is enhanced and preschool are to operate under similar regulations for parental influence as other forms of school. In addition to everyday conversations and more structured activities for parents held at the preschool, staff and guardians must engage in a dialogue about the child's development and learning at least once a year. This personal development dialogue should be based on a broad and detailed picture of the child's development and learning.

## Revised curriculum in brief

The preschool principal organiser decides, within the framework of the curriculum, how the preschool is to operate. The curriculum sets out fundamental values and tasks, national goals and guidelines for preschool, etc.

The pedagogical principles of the preschool curriculum are based on the assumption that care and education go hand in hand. A good caring environment is an important ingredient for development and learning, while care in itself has pedagogical import. The curriculum also emphasises the importance of play for the child's learning and development, as well as the child's own creativity and own activity. Preschool should be fun, secure and rich in learning for all children.

### New and clearer goals and guidelines

The curriculum's goals for children's language and communicative development, as well as for their mathematical development, have been clarified and extended. The goals for natural sciences and technology have also become clearer and increased in number. The goals specify a direction for the pedagogical activities of preschool.

### New section on evaluation

A new section has been added to the curriculum concerning follow-up, evaluation and development. The purpose of evaluation is to gain knowledge about preschool quality that can contribute to the development of the activities so that each child is given the best opportunities for development and learning.

### Responsibility of preschool teachers and working teams

Some of the working guidelines are now clearly directed at preschool teachers who, accordingly, are given the pedagogical responsibility for children's development and learning. There are also guidelines concerning individual responsibility in the working team. Both preschool teachers and child minders, as

well as others in the working team, are to jointly design and carry out the pedagogical activities in order to meet the goals of the curriculum.

### Responsibility of the preschool head

A new section in the curriculum clarifies the responsibility of the preschool head. The preschool head is both the pedagogical leader and the head of staff, and has overall responsibility for conducting activities in accordance with the Education Act and the curriculum. Responsibility for quality at the preschool is also included.

### Boost for Preschool

In addition to a clearer preschool curriculum, increased knowledge and enhanced teaching skills among preschool staff are also needed. For this reason, an in-service training initiative is being carried out during 2009–2011, at a cost of SEK 600 million, within the framework of the Boost for Preschool. Preschool heads, preschool teachers and child minders participating in the Boost for Preschool receive continuing professional development within the areas specified in the curriculum, particularly children's development in language and mathematics as well as evaluation. This will help to strengthen the task of preschool and promote the fulfilment of its goals.



REGERINGSKANSLIET

**Ministry of Education and Research  
Sweden**

SE-10333 Stockholm, Sweden  
Phone switchboard +46 8 405 10 00

All inquiries about content should be directed to Christer Tofténus, tel +46 8 405 44 73. Additional copies of the fact sheet can be ordered from the Ministry of Education and Research, tel +46 8 405 10 00. The Government's website: <http://www.sweden.gov.se/>

Fact sheet produced by the Ministry of Education and Research. Printed by XGS Grafisk Service, Stockholm, Sweden, June 2011. Article no. 2011.009.