

# Access for all at school

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# The project

- A cooperation between SPSM (Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools) and Mälardalen University
- Questionnaires were filled out by teachers and other staff at preschools and schools in 40 municipalities in one region of Sweden. Interviews with teachers in some of the schools were also conducted
- Both questionnaires and interviews explored different aspects of accessibility in the physical, pedagogical and social environments

# The physical environment

The physical environment was assessed in the categories:

- Mobility access
- Usability of spaces/rooms
- Orientation aspect

In the questionnaire accessibility points were given and the results show that for both preschools and schools the orientation aspect was estimated least accessible

Most classrooms were judged cramped for space, but some schools had the opposite situation when they described their physical environment as a totally open space.

One of the teachers said in an interview:

”This can be experienced as a total lack of structure [..] and it is difficult to find your way around the school...”

The mobility access and usability were assessed as relatively good by the school staff.

In spite of this, Swedish schools usually do not have the readiness to welcome new pupils with disabilities. When a pupil with disabilities comes to the school, the school will first have to adapt the physical environment to individual needs before education can start.

# The pedagogical environment

Both questionnaires and interviews contained questions about:

- Multimodality in everyday teaching
- Accessible information in school material and books
- Technical aids

The findings show that accessibility to the pedagogical environment can be divided into three categories

1. Traditional teaching
2. Some teachers have started to change their teaching
3. A few teachers have come a long way towards accessibility in their classrooms

One example of teaching that has come a long way towards accessibility for all

Two teachers that work together in a secondary classroom always present the material for the day at different levels of difficulty so that pupils can choose which level suits them best. In the class pupils with and without learning disabilities study together.



One of the teachers says:

”In this class the pupils with learning difficulties do not label themselves as persons with learning disabilities even though their schoolwork follow special school curricula. In an ordinary class there are more opportunities for these pupils – in the special school there are barriers”

# The social environment

The assessment of the social environment started with the question whether the preschools and schools offered joint activities for pupils with and without disabilities.

Questions about cooperation between pupils, the school atmosphere, intolerance and discrimination were also asked

	Joint activities	No joint activities
<b>Pupils without disabilities do not want to cooperate with pupils with disabilities</b>	41%	56 %
<b>The atmosphere in the school is prejudiced and intolerant</b>	6 %	26 %
<b>Discrimination from school staff</b>	12 %	29 %

# The social environment – a conclusion

The preschools and schools that give opportunities for pupils to participate in joint activities also provide a more accessible social environment. There the atmosphere is tolerant and accepting and there are few incidents of discrimination compared with preschools and schools that do not provide joint activities for all their pupils.

The table also shows that in the teachers' perception, pupils without disabilities do not want to cooperate with their peers with disabilities. This is often the case regardless of whether joint activities are offered or not. This is not in accordance with basic ethical values of Swedish preschools and schools and will have to be addressed.