



SWEDISH NATIONAL
AUDIT OFFICE

Summary

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Central government initiatives for equitable grading

– the discrepancy between grades and national test results

Summary

Grades are of crucial importance for the future education and careers of young people. Therefore, it is essential that grading as far as possible is carried out in an equitable manner.

The assessment of the Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) is that the amendment to the Education Act – to take particular account of the results of national tests in grading – and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate's regular inspection and quality control so far has had little impact on equity in grading, based on the discrepancy between grades and national test results. Large gaps between grades and national test results persist. The Swedish NAO therefore considers that the Government needs to do more to increase equity in grading.

Audit findings

The national tests affect grading

The Swedish NAO's audit shows that the proportion of pupils who receive a grade that is inconsistent with their national test result is largest among pupils who fail the mathematics and Swedish tests. In subjects for which there are no national

tests, schools on average set higher grades compared with subjects for which there are national tests.

Taking particular account of the national test results has not had any clear impact

To date, the amendment of the Education Act has not had any clear impact on equity in grading. The Swedish NAO's register study shows that in upper secondary school the gap between grades and national test results in mathematics has decreased, while for Swedish the gap has increased somewhat.

Interviews with teachers and principals in compulsory and upper secondary school indicate that the new provision has not had any major impact on teachers' work; they continue to assess and grade their pupils as they always have. The interviewed teachers interpret the amendment as meaning that the national tests "are important" in the grading process, but it is unclear to them to what extent the results should be taken into account in the grading.

It is difficult for the Swedish Schools Inspectorate to tackle discrepancies between grades and national test results

The Swedish NAO assesses that the Swedish Schools Inspectorate's review activities have little impact on equity in grading, judging by the discrepancies between grades and national test results. The assessment of the Swedish NAO is that the legislation is too vague to achieve equitable grading. However, the results show that the agency's inspection has had some effect on grading in the English subject.

Inspectors at the Swedish Schools Inspectorate maintain that the new provision is not specific enough to ensure that teachers give adequate consideration to national tests when setting their grades. It is impossible to tackle the gap between national test results and grades by means of the current legislation.

The Swedish NAO considers that the Swedish Schools Inspectorate can improve its follow-up of schools that have been criticised with respect to assessment and grading in their quality review. Following up how the discrepancy between grades and national test results in schools changes over time can give the Swedish Schools Inspectorate an indication of whether the implemented measures have affected the discrepancy. Today, schools that have been criticised in the area of assessment and grading are only required to provide a written reply stating what measures they have taken or intend to take. Then, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate determines whether this is sufficient for addressing the problems, but does not follow up the measures.

The Swedish NAO's recommendations

The Swedish NAO finds that the amendment in the Education Act has not had any clear impact on the gap between grades and national test results. The Swedish NAO assesses that the amendment is unclear for teachers and principals and not specific enough for the Swedish Schools Inspectorate's inspection. Moreover, centralised correction and digitalisation of the national tests will not remedy the problem. These measures only affect how the tests are corrected, not how the grades are set in relation to them. For grading to become more equitable, more needs to be done.

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendation to the Government

- Investigate how grading can be made more equitable.

The investigation can produce and study a moderating model to promote equitable grading and fairer selection to higher education. The investigation can also look into the possibility of formalising acceptable deviation measures at the group or school level. Deviation measures can be used in the Swedish Schools Inspectorate's inspection activities and can also support teachers in their assessments and grading.

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendation to the Swedish Schools Inspectorate

- Improve follow-up of assessment and grading in their quality reviews.