



Summary:

Sami education – time for a restart

Summary and recommendations

The Swedish National Audit Office has audited central government initiatives for Sami education implemented by the Sami Education Board. The audit included investigating whether the Sami Education Board achieves its objectives and whether the Government's governance of the Sami Education Board creates good conditions for the Board's work.

Background and reasons

The Sami Education Board is to promote access to equal quality education for all children of Sami, with Sami educational components. To achieve these objectives the Sami Education Board is tasked with fulfilling central government principal responsibility for Sami school (pre-school class – year 6) and implementing other educational initiatives for Sami pupils who for various reasons do not attend a Sami school. According to the Government, Sami school is to contribute to preserving and developing the Sami language and Sami culture.

Ahead of the audit the Swedish NAO studied reports from the Swedish NAO's financial auditors, the National Financial Management Authority and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, which reported deficiencies in the work of the Sami Education Board. The Swedish NAO also observed that the number of pupils attending Sami school has been low for a long time; for example in the smallest Sami school there were 9 pupils in 2016. The Swedish NAO also noted that the number of pupils studying Sami in year 9 of compulsory school has fallen in the past ten years and totalled 19 in the 2015/16 academic year.

Audit findings

The efficiency of central government initiatives for Sami education implemented by the Sami Education Board is low in several respects. This means that the initiatives do not have the intended effect on the Riksdag's overall objective for Sami education and culture. It also

means that Sami pupils in Sami school risk not having adequate conditions for achieving the educational objectives and that Sami pupils outside Sami school do not have access to education with Sami educational components. In the opinion of the Swedish NAO, the Sami Education Board's poor achievement of objectives is due to deficiencies in both the work of the Board and the Government's governance of the Board.

The audit resulted in the following findings and conclusions.

Many deficiencies in the work of the Sami Education Board

The audit shows that for a long period the Sami Education Board has not fulfilled or inadequately fulfilled several of its tasks and in addition the Board finds it difficult to meet fundamental requirements made of a public agency. The Swedish NAO considers that the insufficient achievement of objectives is due in part to the Sami Education Board management not having worked with a sufficiently long-term perspective to create structures for the Board's activities. Despite the fact that the Sami Education Board is an agency that has existed for a long time, there is no clear planning, follow-up and development in several of the Board's areas of activity. This means for example that previous experience and knowledge of development initiatives have not been possible to utilise in the Board's development work.

The lack of structures means that responsibility for general and strategic tasks has fallen to the school head and office, along with tasks of a more operational nature. The heavy workload that this has entailed is one explanation for the deficiencies in the Board's achievement of objectives and according to the Swedish NAO is also a reason for the Board's work having a clearly reactive character. The recurring financial difficulties of recent years have further augmented these tendencies.

Deficiencies in achievement of objectives and conditions are not new

The Sami Education Board does not create sufficiently good conditions for the activities in its Sami schools. Deficiencies in the systematic quality work and coordination between the different Sami schools that were pointed out already in 2003 by the National Agency for Education and again in 2013 by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, still remain. Nor are indications that pupils do not achieve sufficient skills in the Sami subject a new observation, but were noted in 2003 by the National Agency for Education.

Sami integrated teaching is an important form of education for pupils not attending a Sami school. The number of pupils has varied between about 150 and 200 in the past decade, but the activities are still underdeveloped, both in terms of content and range.

Several development areas identified by the National Agency for Education in 1994 and 2003 still apply.

Access to Sami teaching material and Sami teachers are basic preconditions for enabling the Sami Education Board to achieve its objectives. Already in 1977 the Government noted that the shortage of teachers of Sami to a great extent prevented the realisation of a Sami education path and that the need for teaching material for Sami education was extremely great. These deficiencies still exist. Teacher training for Sami subject teachers has existed since 2015 but has no registered students. Since 2005 the Sami Education Board has been involved in production of 12 Sami teaching material items. As a comparison, the Sami Parliament of Norway completed 352 Sami teaching material projects from 2009 to 2013.

Limited initiatives for Sami pupils who do not attend Sami school

The Sami Education Board's objective is to promote access to equal high quality education for all children of Sami, with Sami educational components. Apart from the 180 or so pupils in the Sami schools, there are at least 500 pupils in municipal and independent schools whose schooling could be affected by the work of the Sami Education Board, for example through Sami integrated teaching. However, there are several major deficiencies in the work of the Sami Education board on assignments that target pupils outside the Sami schools. For example, the Board's work to develop and expand integrated teaching and the initiatives to provide information about Sami school and the activities it offers has been very limited. About 95 per cent of the Board's appropriations go to Sami school, which is one reason why several other assignments are virtually ignored. At the same time, it is natural for the Sami Education Board to give priority to its responsibility for Sami school, as that is the function that is most clearly governed by the Education Act, supervision and the Board's appropriation directions.

The Government's governance is insufficient

Despite the fact that the Sami Education Board's difficulties in achieving its objectives and fulfilling its remit have been known for a long time, in many cases for decades, the Government has not succeeded in translating this knowledge into appropriate governance of the Board. The Government has neither succeeded in achieving effective governance within the framework of the current structure, nor in proposing a new one.

The current governance chain is unclear and not appropriate. The Government can neither influence the composition of the committee that governs the Board, nor dismiss it (or the school head). However, the Sami Parliament does have this possibility, but since the Sami Parliament does not follow up the Sami Education Board's activities and the Sami

Education Board does not report to the Sami Parliament either, it is unclear who has the overall responsibility for the activities of the Sami Education Board.

The Sami Education Board is set up as a committee agency, a form of management that is not adapted to the activities of the Board and that impairs the conditions for effective internal control. In addition, the Sami Parliament's appointment of the Sami Education Board management does not take into account the Board's remit. A basic idea is that the management of a committee agency is to be selected on the basis of the requirements and expectations made of the agency in question. Instead, the Sami Parliament appoints the members of the Sami Education Board on political grounds.

The schools are the part of the activities that function best

Despite the deficiencies that have emerged, the Swedish NAO considers that the activities in the Sami schools on the whole function well, as regards the parts the Swedish NAO has audited. Pupils attending a Sami school achieve at least as good learning outcomes as other pupils in the same municipalities. This applies both to pupils in year 6 and in year 9. The staff in nursery schools and schools are deeply committed both to the pupils' schooling and their own work, not least as regards fulfilling the remit of passing on Sami culture and history to the pupils. However, the costs of Sami schools are high. In 2015 the cost per pupil was about four times as high as for other compulsory school pupils. At the same time, it is not possible to state with certainty how great the differences are, or what these differences are due to, since the Sami Education Board's reporting and analysis of costs is far too inadequate.

There are also indications that the pupils are not provided adequate conditions for achieving the objectives in Sami, which is one of the assignments that differentiate Sami school from other types of school. The Swedish NAO considers that Sami schools need to develop better strategies to enable pupils to achieve the objectives. It remains for the management of the Sami Education Board and the Government to create the conditions that correspond to the commitment and the motivation shown by staff in the Sami schools.

Incorporate the Sami Education Board into the Sami Parliament

The Swedish NAO considers that a transfer of the Sami Education Board's remit to the Sami Parliament could have several positive effects and improve the conditions necessary for the Riksdag's objectives for Sami education to be fulfilled to a greater extent. Perhaps the most significant advantage would be a clearer governance chain. Incentives and possibilities for performance reporting and accountability could be changed to give

the Sami Parliament a clear responsibility for leading the work with Sami education. In addition, a number of coordination gains could be realised in that the Sami Parliament's language work and the Sami Education Board's education remit would be gathered under one roof. Both the agencies' information responsibilities could also be coordinated through an amalgamation.

Incorporating the tasks of the Sami Education Board into the Sami Parliament is also in line with the Instrument of Government, which stipulates that the Sami people's opportunities to maintain and develop their own cultural and community life must be promoted. The Riksdag decided in 1962 that children of Sami must have access to two equivalent education alternatives: state Sami school and municipal compulsory school. In accordance with the decision, Sami school should continue as a separate type of school as long as the Sami themselves so desire. Sami influence over Sami education has gradually increased and in 1994 the Riksdag decided that the Sami Parliament should appoint the Sami Education Board's management on the grounds that the Sami would gain "some" influence over Sami education issues. At the same time the Bill stated that the Sami Parliament as a public agency should play a central role in the work of designing Sami education in the future, which the Riksdag did not oppose.

Objectives difficult to reconcile

The Swedish NAO's recommendation to incorporate the Sami Education Board into the Sami Parliament is based on the Riksdag's objectives and intentions concerning Sami co-determination and the Government's ability to take responsibility for central government activities – two ambitions that to some extent constitute a conflict of objectives. The Riksdag has not expressed how these objectives should relate to each other, and nor has the Swedish NAO made any relative valuation between them.

In the opinion of the Swedish NAO, a transfer of the remit of the Sami Education Board to the Sami Parliament could improve conditions for better achievement of objectives. The Government's ability to govern the activities should not be changed, however. The Government will not have the power to make appointments even for a changed organisation. Since the Sami Parliament, like the Sami Education Board, is a public agency under the Government, central government's principal responsibility for the activities remains, however.

Solving the fundamental conflict of objectives around central government principal responsibility that at the same time must promote Sami autonomy is beyond the remit of this audit.

Investigate the conditions for fulfilling the Sami Education Board's remit

An appropriate form of management, a clear chain of responsibility, an agency management that is familiar with the remit and a permanent solution to the position of school head are important prerequisites for the effectiveness and appropriateness of the activities conducted by the Sami Education Board.

At the same time, the Swedish NAO wishes to underline that the prolonged difficulties of the Sami Education Board to fulfil its remit and meet the general requirements of a public agency also indicate more fundamental problems, which will only be partially remedied by incorporating its activities into the Sami Parliament. The Board's instructions and funding probably need to be changed to give the agency reasonable opportunities to manage its remit. Even if the deficiencies in the Sami Education Board's follow-up and performance reporting make more qualified analysis of the organisation's effectiveness difficult, the failures in achievement of objectives are so many and long-term that there is much to indicate that the Board does not have adequate conditions for fulfilling its remit.

The Swedish NAO's recommendations

The Government should:

- consider proposing to the Riksdag that the activities conducted by the Sami Education Board be incorporated into the Sami Parliament.

The Government should, regardless of which agency is responsible for carrying out the Sami Education Board's tasks:

- investigate the Sami Education Board/Sami Parliament's ability to fulfil the remit,
- investigate other school agencies' abilities to carry out some of the tasks, for example promotion of teaching material production, and
- develop follow-up of the Sami Education Board's activities, with a view to making appropriate assessments of the Board's performance.

The Sami Education Board should:

- create appropriate and effective management of operations,
- develop performance reporting,
- create procedures that enable long-term and sustainable quality work in Sami schools, and
- create long-term and targeted work around teaching in Sami.