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Cluster "Access and Social Inclusion in Lifelong Learning"

Peer Learning Activity on “Preschool education in Sweden and the connection between pre-schooling, school-age childcare and compulsory school in the light of life-long-learning”

Stockholm, 3rd to 5th December 2008

Final report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	FOREWORD	3
2.	BASIC CONCEPTS	4
3.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
4.	MAIN REPORT	8
4.1	THE POLICY BRIEFING	8
4.1.1.	The Curriculum for the preschool and the Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the preschool class and the out of school centre	9
4.1.2.	The role of childcare	10
4.1.3.	Staff training for preschool activities and childcare for children at school	12
4.1.4	Financing and fees	12
4.1.5.	Evaluation and the role of Inspection	13
4.1.6.	Minorities, migrants and specific language support	15
4.2.	SITE VISITS	17
4.2.1.	Täby – Visits to a preschool and out of-school childcare in a high socioeconomic status suburban area	17
4.2.2.	Rinkeby and Hjulsta – Visits to a preschool and out of school childcare in low socioeconomic status suburban areas	19
4.2.3.	Södermalm – Visit to a preschool in a middle class area in the heart of Stockholm	22
4.3.	LESSONS LEARNT	23
4.3.1.	In relation to the overall policy context of preschool education	23
4.3.2.	In relation to the content and organisation of preschool education	24
4.3.3.	In relation to the content and organisation of out of-school childcare	26
4.3.4.	In relation to previous work of the Cluster	26
	Annex 1: Key education indicators for Sweden	27
	Annex 2: List of participants	29

1. FOREWORD

The Cluster 'Access and Social Inclusion in Lifelong Learning' undertook its sixth Peer Learning Activity (PLA) in Stockholm, Sweden, between the 3rd and the 5th December 2008.

After having worked extensively on measures and policies for tackling early school leaving (mainly in Belgium, Ireland, and France); having addressed issues of segregation affecting ethnic minorities (mainly in Hungary); and having learnt on innovative measures for dealing with social and cultural diversity (mainly in the Basque Country, in Spain), as well as having participated in an ad-hoc PLA on Adult Education in Ireland, this time the Cluster looked at issues related to the provision of high quality preschool education for all and the connection between pre-schooling, school-age childcare and compulsory schooling. Preschool education, in effect, ought to be considered as the first step of Lifelong Learning, and its benefits are particularly undisputed when it comes to socially disadvantaged groups, the main focus of the work of the Cluster. This being said, Swedish policy for pre-schooling does not particularly target any disadvantaged groups, since it is a policy targeted to all children.

The PLA, however, also covered ground that allowed participants to relate the lessons learnt in previous PLAs –particularly in relation to support to the education of children and youngsters with migrant background– to the Swedish context, where the approach towards some important issues, e.g. the place given to the mother tongue (when this is not the main language of instruction) in the learning process, is rather different. The provision of school-age childcare at compulsory schools was also an important part of the PLA.

The aim of this report is to give an overview, to the Cluster members and to a broader audience, of the content and lessons learnt during the PLA.

The PLA started at the Ministry of Education and Research with a technical briefing and was followed by visits, spread over three days, to three preschool establishments and three compulsory schools offering after-school childcare, in order to witness how preschool education operates in practice and how it prepares children with a diversity of needs for transition to compulsory schooling. The choice of the education establishments to visit by our hosts was particularly well-thought, as it allowed comparisons across very different social contexts.

Cluster members and the European Commission wish to thank our hosts, the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research and the National Agency for Education, for their hospitality and for providing a comprehensive insight into an essential part of their education system, and to the schools visited for allowing us to observe real life challenges and practices for inclusive education.

Our special thanks go to Ursula Armbruster, of the Ministry of Education and Research, and Kristina Wester, of the Swedish National Agency for Education, for making this PLA possible.

2. BASIC CONCEPTS

Parental leave in Sweden

Parental leave in Sweden is one of the most generous in the world. A total of 390 days (at 80% of the daily wages, up to a ceiling), plus 90 days (at a rate of around 20€ per day) is allowed. This entitlement can be divided equally between the parents, but one parent can give his/her right to the other, except for a minimum of 60 days. The leave can be used until the child reaches the age of eight or comes to the end of the first year in school. The father (or another person) has also 10 extra days paternity leave (at 80% of the daily wages, up to a ceiling) that has to be used within 60 days after the child has come home from the hospital.

Preschooling

Preschool education in Sweden is designed for children from the age of one up until they start the preschool class at the age of six (it is possible to start preschool class even at the age of five), or the compulsory school at the age of seven. There are three types of preschool activities which children may attend on voluntary basis. They can be run in the form of preschools themselves, but also of family day cares or supplementary so-called 'open preschools' (part-time educational activities mainly for children with parents or other adults working at home).

Municipalities have the obligation to provide preschools or family-day-care homes for children whose parents work or study, or for children with a particular need for such activities. This obligation extends also to children of unemployed persons or persons on parental leave, for a minimum of 3 hours per day or 15 hours per week. A child shall be offered a place without unreasonable delay, i.e., normally within 3-4 months of the parents having requested a need for a place. A place shall be offered as near the child's home as possible.

The provision of universal preschool for 4 to 5-years-old children is mandatory for the municipalities – children are able to participate on a voluntary basis.

Preschools

Preschools provide full time educational care, and are open throughout the year. Open hours are adopted to the work- or study hours of the parents or to the needs of the child. Preschools are either independently run or managed by the municipalities, who by law are obliged to offer a place to every child. They are publicly funded, although some fees are paid by the parents depending on their income and the number of children in the family.

Preschool class

The preschool class is organised for 6-year-old children at least 525 hours/year. It is possible to start preschool class even at the age of five. Preschool class is not compulsory but the vast majority of children attend this form (around 96%). Preschool class is conceived as a transition year to compulsory education, and is usually taught at primary schools, free of charge 525 hours/year.

Out-of-school childcare

Childcare for children at school is run by the municipalities in the form of out of school centres and family day care homes for children 6 to 12, or open after school centres for children 10 to 12. Municipalities have the obligation to provide out-of-school childcare for children whose parents work or study, or for children with a particular need for such activities. The activities are often open 12 hours a day, from 6:30 to 18:30. Children can benefit of it before and after school. Out-of-school childcare has an educational character.

Teaching of the mother tongue

In Sweden, around 16% of all pupils in compulsory school have a different mother tongue than Swedish. Mother-tongue tuition is widely present in the Swedish education system, e.g. 17 % of children with a different mother tongue than Swedish receive some kind of tuition during the preschool, or 55% of them do during compulsory school.

Swedish as a second language

Swedish can be taught as a second language for pupils with a different mother tongue. In this case, it is a subject in its own right rather than a form of special support.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cluster 'Access and Social Inclusion in Lifelong Learning' undertook its sixth Peer Learning Activity (PLA) in Sweden, 3rd to 5th December 2008, hosted by the Swedish Education and Research Ministry and the National Agency for Education (Skolverket).

The PLA was attended by representatives from the Education ministries of Austria, Belgium (French Community), Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Turkey; the Roma Education Fund (Budapest), the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises Providing Public Services (CEEP, United Kingdom); and the European Commission.

The focus of the PLA was on preschool in Sweden and the connection between pre-schooling, school-age childcare and compulsory school in the light of life-long learning. Several studies (e.g. the UNICEF Innocenti report) have pointed at Sweden as having one of the early childhood education and care systems of highest quality in the world, with a firmly established educational character. Sweden has also a well developed after-school childcare system for children in school-age. There was, therefore, an important potential for peer learning through the analysis of the Swedish system and its practices.

The PLA consisted of a mixture of policy briefings, site visits, and reflection and discussion. Participants were able to draw lessons both of a general character (reflected in this report) and in relation to their own national systems.

The policy briefings covered the organisation of the Swedish preschool education system, its curriculum and its perspectives. Its main reform processes and evaluations were presented in detail. After-school activities as an integral part of the education system were also dealt with. Particular attention was paid to how the system caters to pupils with an immigrant background, especially in relation to their linguistic needs.

The site visits covered both pre-school institutions and compulsory schools offering out of school activities. The choice of centres in and around Stockholm was particularly well-thought, as it allowed for observation in very different social settings (upper-, middle- and lower-socioeconomic statuses, as well as native and non-native backgrounds).

Cluster members learnt in relation to the following areas:

- A sensible overall policy context for preschool education (e.g. the importance of investment in preschool; the relevance of unitary settings for the 1 to 5 or 6 year olds; the importance of preparing transition to formal schooling; or the role of inspection to improve pedagogic practice);
- A sensible content and organisation for preschool education (e.g. the integration of education and care; the importance of staff qualifications; the guidance role that a curriculum can have; the emphasis on social competences; or how to approach language development for children with a migrant background);
- A sensible after-school childcare policy (e.g. the need for after-school childcare to form a coherent pedagogic project with formal schooling, as well as its especial importance for children of a disadvantaged background)

Cluster members also noted that, given the right conditions, it is possible to build an education system that provides high quality education for all, irrespective of the fact that urban (and school) segregation around socioeconomic lines still happens.

4. MAIN REPORT

4.1. THE POLICY BRIEFING

The PLA started with a detailed policy briefing by the Ministry of Education and Research which covered the following ground:

- The Ministry and its Agencies
- The Swedish school system
- Pre-school in focus:
 - The governmental assignment to The Swedish National Agency for Education on clarifications in the Curriculum for the pre-school;
 - National evaluation of the Swedish preschool, National Agency for Education
- Out of school activities
- Swedish minorities
- Migration and language support
- A new agency for school inspection: The Swedish Schools Inspectorate

Detailed information on the Swedish school system, including preschools and their organisation, as well as the different bodies and agencies that play a role in it, can be found in the background report to this PLA.¹

4.1.1. The Curriculum for the preschool and the Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the preschool class and the out of school centre

*The Curriculum for the preschool (Lpfö 98)*²

A remarkable aspect of the Swedish preschool education is the fact that it has its own national curriculum, which covers the period for children from the age of one up until they start preschool class mainly at the age of six or the compulsory school at the age of seven.

The Swedish preschool curriculum dates of 1998 and takes the form of an ordinance. It sets out the general principles and goals of this education period, but does not provide syllabi or regulations on how many hours should be allocated to the various activities. It

¹ The background report is to be found, together with this PLA report, in the Education and Training 2010 website.

² The English version of the Curriculum for the preschool is available here: <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=1068> (website checked on 9.2.2009).

is meant to act as a guide which allows preschool heads and other staff to choose the methods by which the main goals can be strived for.

The preschool curriculum is based on some fundamental values and tasks of preschools (notably democratic values for living in society and the task of laying the foundations for lifelong learning), and details goals to strive towards in relation to the following main areas:

- Norms and values (e.g. respect and solidarity, or an understanding that everyone is of equal value, among others);
- Development and learning (e.g. the ability to play and learn or the development of self-autonomy, among others);
- Influence of the child (e.g. the ability to express thoughts and to acquire responsibility);
- Pre-school and home (e.g. enabling parents to be involved and to influence the activities of the preschool); and
- Cooperation between the preschool class, the school and out of school activities (e.g. to observe the need of support and stimulation of every child and also to pay attention to children with special needs during the transition to new activities).

For each of these five main areas, goals are accompanied by guidelines on how to strive for them for all who work in preschools and in particular for preschool teachers.

No formal assessment of individual pupils is foreseen, and in fact this would go against the spirit of the curriculum. Assessment only takes place at group level, with a view to secure the quality of the work and content in the preschool.

*The Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the preschool class and the out of school centre (Lpo 94)*³

The 'preschool class' is aimed at six years old with the objective of preparing them for entering compulsory education at the age of seven.

The national curriculum for the compulsory school system, the preschool class and the leisure-time centre (Lpo 94) dates of 1994. Leisure-time centres also follow this curriculum as far as possible. One of its main aims is to foster an integrated approach between these three types of institutions.

The preschool class, in spite of not being compulsory, is in fact considered part of the school system, and the first step towards the accomplishment of the formal objectives of the curriculum for the compulsory school. This means that the goals for the preschool class aim higher than those stated in the curriculum for preschool. The preschool class combines the pedagogical methods of preschool with those of compulsory education.

³ The English version of the Curriculum is available here: <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=1070> (checked on 9.2.2009)

On the basis of this curriculum, every municipality adopts a local school plan. Principals and teachers enjoy an important degree of flexibility, which makes possible to adapt the content, organization and work methods to the local conditions.

The preschool class is often integrated within an elementary school with respect to staffing, premises and/or educational program. The principle of proximity is applied, and as for the place in a pre-school, a child shall be offered a place in a preschool class as near to his/her home as possible. Reasonable consideration is also paid to the wishes of the child's parent or guardian.

Participation of children in pre-schooling and in the preschool class

In the fall of 2002, 72 percent of all children between the ages of 1 to 5 years old were enrolled in preschools, and 8 percent in family daycares⁴. Five years later, in 2007 the participation increased to 85 percent as the share of children in preschool increased to 80 percent and that of children in family day care fell to 5 percent.

Table 1: Participation of children aged 1-5 in pre-schooling, 2007

Age of child	Preschool (% of the age group)	Family day care home (% of the age group)	Total (% of the age group)
1 year	46	3	49
2 years	85	6	91
3 years	88	6	94
4 years	92	5	97
5 years	92	5	97
ALL 1-5	80	5	85

Source: National Agency for Education

Regarding the preschool class at age 6, the participation rate is of 96 percent.

It is to be noted, however, that compulsory schooling as such only starts at the age of seven, while in most European countries it already starts at the age of six.

4.1.2 The role of childcare

*'Preschool activities' and 'out-of-school-childcare' as an integral part of a lifelong learning process*⁵

⁴ For differences between preschools and family daycares, see point 5 of the Background report.

⁵ This section is based on information by the Swedish National agency for Education on childcare provided at <http://www.skolverket.se> and presentation to the PLA participants by Ursula Armbruster of the Ministry of Education and Research.

In Sweden, childcare is given an important role in educational policy. This was one of the reasons why the Ministry of Education and Research took over responsibility for childcare from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in 1996.

There are two categories of childcare: so-called 'preschool activities' and 'childcare for schoolchildren'. Their common dual aim is: a) to enable parents to combine parenthood with work or studies, and b) to provide children with favourable conditions for growing up through high quality pedagogical activities combining education and care.

Preschool activities: run in the form of preschools, family daycares or open preschools for children aged 1 until they start pre-school class or the compulsory school

Childcare for schoolchildren (including those who attend the preschool class): runs in the form of after-school centres and family day care for children aged 6 to 12, or open after school centres for children aged 10-12.

Municipalities have a large degree of autonomy in deciding together with school establishments the opening hours for childcare. Many childcare facilities are open twelve hours a day from 6:30 to 18:30, also during school holidays.

Table 2: Participation in childcare of children aged 1-12 by form of activities, 2007

Form of care	Percent of the age group	Age group of child
Preschool	80	1-5
Family day care homes	5	1-5
Private solutions (year 2002)	2	1-5
Home (year 2002)	13	1-5
Out of school activities	79	6-9
Out of school activities	12	10-12
Open out of school activities	(children are not formally enrolled in open school activities)	
Family day care	0.3	6-12

Source: National Agency for Education

The regulations governing childcare are set out in the Education Act. The Act defines the forms of childcare that are to be provided. It also spells out the obligation of local authorities to provide childcare for children aged 1-12 to the extent required in order for parents to be able to work or study. This obligation also applies in the case of children with care needs of their own irrespective of the occupation of their parents. Children in need of special support are always entitled to a childcare place at a preschool or out of school centre.

There is an aim of bringing childcare and schooling closer together and encouraging the development of a joint pedagogical approach. All pedagogical activities for children and young people are to be seen as part of a lifelong learning process.

4.1.3 Staff training for preschool activities and childcare for children at school

Preschool teachers and leisure teachers undergo a three and a half-year pedagogical training programme at university focusing on teaching methods, development psychology, family sociology and creative activity. Child-carers, on the other hand, have as a rule upper-secondary qualifications, while childminders have often attended training courses organized by the local authority itself.

Over half of all preschool employees have university degrees in preschool education, while just over 40 per cent of staff is made up of child-carers. At after-school centres some 70 per cent have university degrees in recreational or leisure education or in some other kind of teacher's training, while 20 per cent are child-carers. About 3 per cent of the staff at preschools and 19 of the staff in out of school centres are men.

Virtually all staff in childcare services in Sweden has some form of training for working with children. This includes the main four staff categories: preschool teachers, leisure teachers, child-carers and childminders in family day-care.

4.1.4. Financing and fees

In Sweden, Early Childhood Education and Care (comprising preschool, family day care homes and open preschools) is financed mainly out of public funds. This, irrespective of the fact that preschools may be either publicly-run (by the municipalities) or privately-run⁶. In practice, privately-run preschools receive the same treatment as publicly-run ones, and parents pay the same level of fees that they would pay at a municipality-run preschool. While some municipalities actively incentivize the establishment of privately-run preschools, this seems more to be a choice of 'philosophy' (i.e. in relation to what should be the place of private entrepreneurs in education) than of finance strictly speaking.

The total cost in 2007 of preschool education and after-school childcare for children aged 1 to 12 was of approximately 5.5 billion €, totalling two percent of the Swedish GDP. The funding comes partly through central government grants and partly by tax revenue. Parental fees are also used to a lesser extent (see below).

- More specifically in relation to childcare, municipalities are permitted to charge parents a reasonable fee for a place in 'preschool activities' or 'childcare for school children'. However, fees may not exceed the actual costs incurred, nor be so high that parents decline activities that would have been of value for the child. From 1st January 2002, there is a maximum fee that municipalities may apply for these activities. This means that fees are means-tested and a ceiling is set on the fees payable by parents for their children.
- In relation to preschool activities (preschool and family day-care homes), the fee charged may not be more than between one and three percent of the family's income,

⁶ In Sweden, the term 'independent' is used to refer to privately-run preschools which are nevertheless funded with public funds. In this report we use the term 'private' as it is more widely used in Europe.

depending on how many children the family has. The fee may not, however, be more than 1 260 kronor (circa 117 €) per month for the family's first child, 840 kronor (circa 78 €) for the second child and 420 kronor (circa 39 €) for the third child. There is no charge for the fourth or following child.

In practice, in the childcare system for school-age children (out of school centres and family day care homes), the fee charged may not be more than between one and two percent of the family's income, depending on how many children the family has. The fee may not, however, exceed 840 kronor (circa 78 €)⁷ per month for the family's first child and 420 kronor (circa 39 €) for the second and third child. There is no charge for fourth child (or following child). School-age childcare costs in Sweden in 2007 were of approximately 3 280 € per child, totalling around 109 million €.

For municipalities, introduction of the maximum fee is voluntary. Nevertheless, virtually all of the country's municipalities applied the maximum fee system already in 2003. Those municipalities adopting this system receive compensation for loss of income and they also receive funds for the introduction of measures to ensure that there is no drop in overall quality.

No fee is charged for 6-year-olds in preschool classes for up to fifteen hours per week, or 525 hours per year. The preschool class is a form of schooling, closely linked to compulsory school and thus falls under the school arrangements, and not childcare. The average expenditure for the public for preschool class in 2007 was of approximately 4,630 € per child per year, totalling 39 million € in 2007.

4.1.5. Evaluation and the role of Inspection

National evaluation of the preschool⁸

Since the introduction of the preschool curriculum in 1998, two national evaluations of the preschool have been carried out. The first results were published in 2004 under the title *Preschool in transition*, and the second in 2008 entitled *10 years after the preschool reform*.

The five areas of goals and guidelines in the curriculum have been subject to assessment. The evaluations have looked at the ways that institutions operate, how they perceive and implement their task and what similarities and differences exist between municipalities and preschools, and not the competences of individual children

Both the first and the second evaluations have shown that the curriculum was welcome by the administrative management, heads of preschools and preschool staff.

The intention to develop continuity in the education system by bringing the preschool and compulsory school closer together was positively perceived already in 2004 as the coordination has generally been achieved by municipalities steering the preschool and

⁷ 1 SEK = 0.0925372 EUR - currency conversion rate of 12 February 2009

⁸ This section is based on the reports *Förskola i brytningstid* (2004), <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=1272> and *Tio år efter förskolereformen* (2008) <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=2096> and oral presentation to the PLA participants given by Tommy Lagergren of the Swedish National Agency for Education (websites checked on 9.2.2009).

compulsory school through “*joint plans and goals, quality reports and other types of written documents*”⁹.

The 2008 report also shows that respect for children’s own interests and initiatives have increased. Staff has become more aware that learning must be based on children’s experiences and children’s motivation.

However, a complex and somewhat contradictory picture is drawn in 2008 from the questionnaire survey directed to the municipal heads of education in all municipalities and municipal districts, case studies in a sample of municipalities and preschool units located in different kinds of catchment areas (high socioeconomic level areas, low socioeconomic level areas and mixed areas), where municipal heads of education, preschool heads and preschool staff were interviewed.

On the one hand there is strong support for the 'Educare' system, combining care, nurture and learning, focus on pedagogical development, and closer link between preschool and compulsory schools.

On the other hand there is concern for the far-reaching impact of decentralisation because of differences in the composition of the population in different catchment areas, and lack of staff, especially for addressing children with special needs. Variations between, and within, municipalities observed in 2004 are five years later even stronger. This is because in reality preschools have different conditions and possibilities to work with the curriculum as the foundation.

Furthermore, decentralised responsibility requires more municipality quality control. Although assessment of individual children’s development is contrary to the intention of the curriculum the new survey indicates that there is a stronger demand from the municipal level for more focus on evaluation and quality control, as well as individual children assessment via observations, surveys and documentation of individual children, rather than only group assessment (which is the rule). This poses numerous challenges to the normative goals of the curriculum, and raises questions as to what exactly should children be able to do and how achievements are to be measured in early childhood.

In the 2004 national evaluation report the National Agency welcomed the great importance that the child’s learning was given in the preschool after the reform. It also warned against excessive emphasis placed on formal learning at an early stage, which can have negative consequences and be in conflict with the overall goals of the curriculum. The 2008 report shows that, ten years after the reform, there are pressures that preschool gives more focus on learning itself instead of putting full effort into care, nurturing and learning as a coherent whole.

Greater focus on preparation for school, language development, and assessing individual children would be a major turning point in the Swedish model. The feasibility and desirability of such changes receive much attention in Sweden, and were extensively discussed by the PLA participants after the visits to preschools.

*National inspection*¹⁰

⁹ "Pre-school in transition", p. 19.

¹⁰ This section is based on the presentation at PLA by Marie-Hélène Ahnborg of the Swedish School Inspectorate.

A new independent inspectorate was set up in 2008 with the aim of undertaking regular supervision of all 6 000 schools in the country, split in 290 municipalities, within a six year period. The inspectorate is also in charge of conducting thematic quality evaluations, as well as investigating complaints. The new agency has five regional offices and 200 inspectors.

The inspection tasks focus, on the one hand, on legal obligations, namely that municipalities and schools fulfil their responsibilities in relation to the regulations set out in the Education Act, but also, on the other hand, on quality and quality assurance mechanisms: how well educational activities and schools are functioning in relation to the national curriculum, and whether municipalities and schools have systems for self-evaluation and strategies for self-improvement.

The key areas for regular inspection relate to learning (standards of achievement; follow up and evaluation of learning; assessment and grading; special needs support); values (school ethos and working conditions; civic education, democratic processes and student influence); and governance and quality assurance (municipal accountability, head teacher leadership, quality assurance).

Topics for thematic quality evaluations in 2008/2009 include: teaching of mathematics; teachers' level of education; dropouts; education of newly arrived pupils; education of pupils with disabilities; and adult education performance.

Preschool activities and after-school childcare are inspected only on a municipality level and not on the level of every single activity.

Up to date, there is confirmation that the preschool quality is high and that the preschools are performing very well within the education system. The record of inspections shows that teachers and headmasters welcome inspections as they perceive them as help for improving their pedagogical practices, rather than a test.

4.1.6. Minorities, migrants and specific language support

Swedish minorities

Although not the main topic of this PLA, participants were also briefed on the situation in Sweden in relation to Swedish minorities and migration and language support. This was greatly appreciated as it allowed relating the Swedish context to an important part of the previous work of the cluster.

The Swedish education pursues the national minority policy which has as objective the protection of national minorities, and strengthening their power to influence and support the historical minority languages.¹¹ Swedish national minorities are the Jews, the Roma, the Sami, the Swedish Finns and the Tornedalers. The minority languages are Yiddish, Romani Chib, Sami, Finnish, and Meänkieli. Specific minority language legislation applies to certain geographical areas. The legislation also gives the right to attend preschool partly or completely in the mother tongue.

¹¹ Fact sheet on "National minorities and minority languages", Ministry for Integration and Gender Equality, July 2007 (<http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/08/56/35/3b0f796c.pdf>) (website checked on 9.2.2009)

Migration and language support

Five forms of language support are provided in Sweden: mother tongue tuition, mother tongue support in preschool, study guidance in mother tongue, bilingual education, and Swedish as a second language.

- In compulsory (and upper secondary) education there is a right to **mother tongue tuition** if one or both of parents have a different mother tongue than Swedish; the language is a daily form of communication for the pupil; the pupil has basic knowledge of the language; there are at least five pupils in the municipality who want tuition in that language; and a teacher can be found. In 2007 about half (54 percent) of pupils in compulsory education who are entitled received mother tongue tuition. The number of pupils in compulsory education receiving mother tongue tuition was a total of 83 483.

In practice, this tuition consists of 40 to 60 minutes per week, at school, but after the school day tuition. As a rule, teachers are not integrated in regular school activities and there are quite some differences between municipalities in the provision of mother tongue tuition.

Evaluation from the National Agency for Education shows that students with mother tongue tuition have significantly higher grades than other students. This, however, may be attributed to multiple factors, including the fact that highly motivated children tend to be the ones to stay for additional tuition after school hours, and not merely to the impact of the learning content.

- **Mother tongue support in preschool**, defined in the curriculum for preschool, should give the opportunity to children with a mother tongue other than Swedish of developing both the Swedish language and their mother tongue. Mother tongue support in preschool can happen in very different forms, but should be arranged more in a form of support than in a form of tuition like in compulsory schools. However, as Table 3 shows in practice only 16 percent of children with a different mother tongue receive mother tongue support.¹²

Table 3 – Preschool education and mother tongue support, 2007

Total number of children in preschool activities	442 500
Children with other mother tongue than Swedish in pre-school and family day-care homes	67 875
Number of children who receive mother tongue support	10 848 (16 %)

Source: National Agency for Education

¹² When visiting preschool establishments, the Cluster has seen in practice measures which preschools have set in place to bring together mother tongue and Swedish language competences when they do not have the necessary staff to cover all languages.

- **Study guidance in mother tongue in schools** includes support in other subjects (e.g. support in maths given in the mother tongue). This is an unconditional right for the pupil if he/she needs it, but in reality it is not always possible to arrange because of the lack of teachers with knowledge of the specific mother tongue of a pupil.
- Schools have the possibility to offer **bilingual education** whereby no more than half of the education can be in another language than Swedish. The system seems to be effective, but rather difficult to arrange for all.
- **Swedish as a second language** is a subject in its own right and an alternative to Swedish. It is the school principal that decides if a pupil should study Swedish or Swedish as a second language. In practice this option is treated as support for generally low-performing pupils. Indeed, practice shows that pupils following Swedish as a second language have lower grades at school.

4.2. SITE VISITS

4.2.1. Täby – Visits to a preschool and out of school childcare in a high socioeconomic status suburban area

Täby is a prosperous city of some 60 000 inhabitants located north of Stockholm. It is a high income area – the average family income is one of the highest in Sweden. In Täby, most families follow the two-job pattern, whereby both mothers and fathers tend to have well-paid jobs in Stockholm. This implies that, given the need for both parents to commute into and out of the capital city, there is a high demand for pre-schools and out of-school childcare.

In Täby, the Cluster visited a “privately”-run preschool and two compulsory schools which offered after-school childcare (and which operate in fact under the same administration).

Margaretelund preschool

Margaretelund is a small preschool that welcomes around 80 children aged 1 to 5. The preschool is made up of several independent modules, interconnected between them, with a typical Swedish building style (little red houses). The whole preschool is, therefore, at ground floor level, and it is within easy reach of forested areas.

The preschool is open from 7 until 17:30, which corresponds to the needs of the parents. Children are split into four groups with some twenty children each. As a rule, at least one member of staff is a teacher with university education, while the others are childminders or assistants. Staff work 40 hours per week, out of which three are for preparation.

The daily routine starts between 7 and 9 in the morning, when the children arrive. Those who do not eat breakfast at home have a sandwich at 8. At 9 they all gather to talk about daily activities –going to the forest, playing in the yard, painting, crafts; all according to age. Between 11 and 11:30 is lunch time. Food is catered as the preschool does not have its own kitchen. All meals are included in the fee that parents pay.

There are no explicit rules for the after-lunch rest. We were told that children who need to sleep do so and that teachers feel and know who needs to sleep. In fact, as we entered

the courtyard of the preschool, we caught sight of some fifteen buggies distributed neatly around the school buildings in which one-year old children were sleeping in open air. At 14:30 there is a small snack. Most children are picked up by parents between 16 and 17 hours, only one or two stay until 17:30.

Administratively, the preschool is an independent one, even if the premises belong to the municipality, to which the headmistress pays a rent. Parents pay a fee to the municipality, which in turn allocates financial resources to the preschool according to the number of children enrolled –the resources allocated are higher for the 1- to 3-year olds, and fewer for the 4- and 5-year olds. How the money is spent is up to the headmistress, who is also free to decide on staff matters. The preschool is inspected by the municipality, and the headmistress reports that inspections in practice help her and her staff to reflect on and improve their pedagogical practices.

The overall impression: It seemed to us that children **learn a lot** in Margeretelund preschool. The children appeared serene, trustful, confident, cooperative, and they were not at all shy. The fact that some fifteen adults were taking over their space did not seem to make them nervous or insecure. Although the preschool policy is one of 'no structured school teaching', many paintings produced by children testify of numerous topical projects that are done at school. One wall was covered by paintings on which each child drew one or another internal organ –a heart, a baby in mother's womb, a brain, etc. It seemed to us a good lesson in human anatomy adapted to the age of the pupils. Margeretelund seemed a good example of some of the main characteristics of the Swedish preschool 'philosophy': it promotes cooperative learning; it encourages cross-age groups' activities; and it works towards the development of social competences.

Byleskolan and Kyrkskolan (pre-school classes, compulsory schools and out-of-school centres)

These are two municipal compulsory schools which welcome children from 6 years of age (preschool class) to 12 years of age (school year five). The main purpose of the Cluster visits to these schools (which took place in parallel, in two separate groups) was to observe and discuss with the schools' staff after-school activities.

Byleskolan has around 270 pupils, out of which around 200 participate in after-school activities. The school is divided into two working units with around 135 pupils, from preschool class to school year five in each unit. Each unit is headed by six teachers, two leisure teachers and two childcarers.

Kyrkskolan has 191 pupils, and 145 of them attend the after-school activities. The daily work is organized in three working units with teachers, leisure staff and childminders working together. In each class there are twenty children.

The two schools operate under a single administration, and in addition to the staff already mentioned, three special needs' teachers, a speech therapist and a school nurse are available. Overall, some 25 percent of children need some special support, and some fifteen children have severe disabilities.

In both schools, regular classes end at 3 p.m. and after-school childcare is available until 4:45 p.m.

After-school activities put a great emphasis in the development of social competences. The kind of activities that the Cluster observed were a stark contrast with what had been

observed elsewhere during other PLAs (where after-school consisted mostly of frontal teaching activities). In general, after-school activities tend to break age-group boundaries, e.g. in Byleskolan the school puts regularly together in after-school activities children of ages 6 and 7; 8 and 9; and 10 and 11. And once a week, all children aged 6 to 12 share the same activities. This is considered a good way for children to learn to cooperate. In addition, children are not grouped according to ability or performance for each of the different activities (such as sports, painting, etc.) Nevertheless, children who academically lag behind can receive one hour of extra support supervised by a teacher to catch up after regular school lessons.

The overall impression was that the childcare provided was of outstanding quality and complementary to regular classes (i.e.: not a repetition of them), as it has a strong focus on the development of social skills, and making learning more attractive to children. Just like in Margaretelund preschool, the general climate was of serenity, calm and conviviality. The links in the pedagogical approach between the independent Margaretelund preschool and these municipal schools were evident with respect to emotional training, age-integrated childcare, and teaching and development of social competences as the basis for subject learning throughout the different educational phases.

4.2.2. Rinkeby and Hjulsta – Visits to a preschool, compulsory school and out of school childcare in low socioeconomic status suburban areas

Rinkeby is a neighborhood of Stockholm, 20 minutes away from the centre by underground. It is composed of housing estates which were built in the 1960s, mainly for young families. Today it is predominantly home to immigrants and refugees. At present, residents speak some 50 different languages, and 99 percent of children in preschool speak another language than Swedish at home.

Since 2007 Rinkeby and Kista form one municipal district in which 45 000 people with different cultures and religions live. Preschools there serve approximately 2 400 children between ages 1 and 5. The most widely spoken languages are Somalian, Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, Farsi, Tigrinya and Serb/Croat/Bosnian. This diversity has called for the development of specific language programmes, notably in the field of second language acquisition. A brochure providing information about preschool activities is published and distributed in sixteen different languages. Most families send their children to preschool from age 1 until they start pre-school class or compulsory school. The collaboration with parents also takes the form of a brochure “Advice for multilingual parents”.

The site-visits to Rinkeby and Hjulsta mirrored the ones undertaken the day before to Täby –a preschool and a compulsory school offering after-school activities, albeit that they took place in a totally different socioeconomic environment. This helped Cluster members to appreciate how the needs of pupils with an immigrant background and low socioeconomic level are addressed in Sweden, compared to what had been seen in previous PLAs. It also allowed comparing between 'high' and 'low' socioeconomic background areas, something which had not been done in previous PLAs –hence helping to contextualize the Cluster's focus within the broader education system of Sweden.

Ovanbygränd preschool

For many pupils with an immigrant background in Rinkeby, preschool is the first place where they enter into contact with the Swedish language. Hence, it is seen as essential in

developing their competences in it –which will be the cornerstone of their future educational careers.

The fact, however, that a preschool in an immigrant populated area puts great emphasis on the learning of the language of instruction of the education system is not in itself a significant innovation –such emphasis is found in preschools throughout Europe. In Ovanbygränd, however, the Cluster found two other interesting approaches:

- In Ovanbygränd, the preschool encourages the preservation of the children's first language. In fact, teachers inform parents of the importance of speaking their mother tongue with children at home and encourage its oral and written usage to be part of the daily life. This is not just an 'empty' recommendation, i.e., this commitment is translated in the preschool practices. For example, books with classical children's stories in Swedish (or English) are translated (usually by a parent) into a language spoken at home, and into as many languages as necessary. The stories are then recorded into CDs, usually by a parent. Progressively, a library of 'mother-tongue stories' is built up in the preschool. Subsequently, children are able to pick up a children's book written in Swedish (or English) and, at the same time, listen to the book's CD in their mother tongue. Thanks to this activity, children reinforce their linguistic competences and learn to valorise both languages. The overall aim is to build on the foundation language –the strongest language of the child. This practice helps compensate for the lack of teachers fluent in all the different languages.
- The pedagogic team of the preschool, however, also felt that given the socioeconomic disadvantage of its pupils, something had to be done to give them some competitive advantage, beyond securing the learning of Swedish and of their mother tongue. Therefore, the preschool has introduced the learning of English at a very early age. This is done mainly through plays and songs. The objective is to give children a sound pronunciation of English. This is considered an added-value for these children, since in any case English is mastered by most Swedish pupils by the time they end secondary education, but not necessarily with an excellent pronunciation –a skill that can be most easily picked up at a very young age.

Another important feature of Ovanbygränd is partnerships with parents. This is an obvious necessity when it comes, for instance, to mother tongue learning. If necessary, the preschool uses interpreters to secure good communication during meetings.

Ovanbygränd also takes part in European cooperation through a Comenius project on the environment which has not only helped with funding, but also supported transversal objectives such as language development, awareness of the environment or knowledge about other EU countries. In the words of the project coordinator *"Unlike many of the countries where our children's parents come from, the environment is an important issue in EU countries. Hopefully stimulating the children to environmental responsibility will influence their families to also take an interest in the environment. One hopes that such thinking and actions will contribute to the possibility for our children and families to be included into the Swedish society"*.

The overall impression was of a home-like environment of high quality. The preschool is well equipped and children appear serene, confident and cooperative. The Cluster witnessed, again, how a lot of emphasis is put in social competences, but also the Swedish approach towards language development at preschool, which seems not only to favour solid language foundations in both the mother tongue and the Swedish language,

but also to respect the children's own personality (i.e. his or her mother tongue, whose appreciation is not seen as detrimental for his or her full integration into the Swedish society). This is considered positive for the child's self-esteem. In addition, the English language early competence development seemed to be an effective way of providing some kind of 'advantage' to children from an otherwise deprived socioeconomic background.

Last but not least, there were no obvious signs of differences in quality between this preschool in a 'deprived' area compared to the previous one in a 'well-off' suburb. If at all, teachers and preschool staff here were more aware of the challenges faced by their children and pupils, but this did not lead them to disaffection, but rather the opposite.

Hjulstaskolan, a compulsory school with after-school activities

Hjulsta is a suburb of Stockholm populated mostly by immigrants. The presence of refugees from war-torn areas, such as Somalia, is particularly noticeable. Hjulsta is for many the first port of call in Sweden –but subsequently many move out. As a consequence, the annual turnover of the population is as high as 30 percent, and this is reflected in the composition of the student body of Hjulstaskolan.

Hjulstaskolan is the first point of contact with the Swedish society for many newly arrived children, and for their parents. However, there are hardly any children of Swedish origin in the school (about 40 nationalities are represented, and only one percent of all pupils speak Swedish at home). Immigrant children of all ages flock to the school, which faces the challenge of helping them, and their families, to integrate in the Swedish society. The school welcomes children 6 to 16 years old.

Very often, the families of these immigrant children have significant cultural deficits of themselves, irrespective of their immigrant condition. Children themselves, even teenagers, might not be able to read and write in their mother tongue, and this also needs to be addressed. Therefore, during the first stage after a pupil has arrived, an important focus is put on language learning, both Swedish and, as far as possible, the pupil's mother tongue. Cluster members could observe, for instance, how Somali teenagers received computer-aided instruction in written Somali language during after-school activities. Support in the mother tongue for other subjects, such as mathematics, is also available, for example in Somali, Persian or Turkish language.

Living conditions are also not easy, with large families often crowded in small flats. Under these circumstances, after-school activities are particularly important for the school to fulfil its broader mission. These take place between 2 and 6 p.m. Again, creativity and self-expression seem to be the key words of after school activities (crafts, painting, poetry, writing, massage, sports, music, etc.). Given the social context of the school, opening hours are particularly extended: the school also offers a "breakfast service" free of charge to all pupils, and, after the after-school activities, it is still possible to use the school premises for sports and other social activities, until 9.

Over time, this personalised support seems to give fruits: most children complete their secondary education and get out of the school well equipped for their further education. The school, on the other hand, seems to have overcome the danger of becoming a 'segregated institution' by providing a safe environment where children feel valued and respected. The approach towards multilingualism also seems to work well –Children keep their mother tongue and become fluent in Swedish and English, just like any other

Swedish pupils, and they are also able of taking another foreign language, which they choose among French, Spanish, Arabic or German.

The school also actively seeks to establish contacts with parents. Some training courses geared to them are also organised in the school premises. Another important feature is the explicit effort to make pupils feel responsible for some essential matters of school life, e.g. fight against bullying or keeping the school clean.

During the course of our visit, the Headmistress of the school, a charismatic figure herself, pointed out that while her school will never appear among the 'top schools' of Sweden if one only looks at the grades of its pupils, it would be more correct to look at their point of departure and their situation and perspectives when they leave the school. Indeed, while it is true that many pupils do not achieve the average Swedish performance level at the same age than the average 'native Swedish' pupil, most of them end up proceeding to further learning and pursue successful careers afterwards. Some will stay in touch with the school and provide a positive role model to the current pupils, e.g. one of the pupils even mentioned to the Cluster that a former student from Hjulstaskolan was now a "*top secretary*" somewhere in the European Union in Brussels.

The overall impression was that of a school which did not differ itself from what we had seen in the rich area of Täby, in relation to, for example, equipment, teacher motivation, etc. The main difference was its multicultural character –as opposed to the monocultural character of Täby– and the school surroundings –grey housing states, compared to the forests that surrounded the schools in Täby.

Beyond the material conditions of the school, however, its strongest points seemed to be the high expectations on all pupils; the positive atmosphere –the focus is put on the strong points and the potential of each child, and not on its weaknesses when they arrive to the school– and the high motivation and enthusiasm of the teaching body, and its headmistress, to continue improving and innovating their pedagogical practice. And, as in Täby, school and after-school activities are not two different worlds, but rather part of the same, coherent pedagogic project, tailored to the needs of the student body.

4.2.3. Södermalm – Visit to a preschool in a middle class area in the heart of Stockholm

Södermalm is a large island south of the old city in Stockholm that was once home to its urban working class. However, due to its central location and its romantic atmosphere, the district has undergone a process of gentrification, and today it is rather home to middle- to upper-income young families who prefer an urban lifestyle.

The Cluster visited the Tjappan preschool in the heart of Södermalm. It is a municipal preschool that caters for 64 children, aged 1 to 5. The preschool has four units –one for children aged 1 to 2; one for ages 2 and a half to 3 and a half; one for 3 and a half to 4; and one for 4 to 5 year olds.

Like the other preschools that the Cluster visited in Sweden, the preschool was very well equipped. It consisted of several different spaces –such as a gymnastics room or a room decorated like an 'ancient' preschool– interconnected between them, and a spacious courtyard.

The pedagogic approach, again, focused on the development of social competences; for example, in the preschool there were hardly any toys suitable for playing alone, given that most of these children already have a lot of them at home, and the focus at the preschool is on learning to cooperate with others through play. In the course of her presentation, the headmistress emphasised this and other important aspects that were common to the other preschools, such as the importance given to the development of language skills at an early age or the close cooperation with the children's families.

The overall impression was one of a very high-quality preschool and a child-centred pedagogy whereby every child's development is closely monitored (there is a ratio of 4.7 children/member of staff). This seemed to us to be a good example of an average, high-quality municipal Swedish preschool. There was absolutely no difference with the private preschool that the Cluster visited in Täby. On the other hand, the social context of this preschool did not seem particularly difficult –young families with a good level of cultural and economic resources. For example, in the words of the headmistress it was common for these children to go with their parents on holidays to places like Thailand, and there were no children with physical or psychic challenges attending the preschool. We assumed, then, that the task of the preschool is not about compensating for any possible deficits of the children, but rather to deepen in the social dimension and exploit their natural curiosity as the best way to put them in the path for lifelong learning.

4.3. LESSONS LEARNT

The PLA was rich in content and the **lessons learnt go well beyond the strict field of preschool education.**

4.3.1. In relation to the overall policy context of preschool education

a) Policy commitments to high quality preschool education for all need to be materialised by ensuring universal access and setting minimum content requirements. The strong commitment in Sweden to preschool education for all in ages 1 until the children start pre-school class or compulsory school, with a social-pedagogical character, regarded as the first step of lifelong learning is reflected in, e.g. the access provisions, which make preschool education universally accessible, or the existence of a Curriculum for the preschool, which anchors its pedagogical character.

b) The policy commitment needs to be matched by a corresponding financial effort. In Sweden, near-universal and high quality preschool education comes at a cost: nearly 2 per cent of the Swedish GDP is spent on preschool education and out of school childcare. However, as it is the case with parental policy arrangements, this seems to pay off.

c) Unitary settings for the whole preschool education period make sense. In Sweden, all preschoolers attend preschool together during the ages 1 until the children start pre-school class or compulsory school. This is rather unique in the EU –in most EU countries there are differentiated settings for children under 3 and above 3. This unitary setting seems to work well, and perhaps allows for a more coherent pedagogic approach over the preschool years.

d) Consciously preparing the transition to compulsory schooling is a good approach. In Sweden, the 'preschool class', for 6 year olds, is more geared as a preparation (a 'bridge')

for compulsory schooling, and it is closely linked to it (mostly it takes place in the same establishments as the schools). This transition year seems to bring good results. One might wonder, however, why it is not compulsory¹³, since in most EU countries compulsory schooling starts at 6 and in any case the rate of participation in the preschool class is almost universal.

e) Given the adequate provisions, it is possible to ensure that conditions of access (including fees) and quality remain fairly homogeneous, even within a very diverse system. In Sweden, the organisation of preschool education is highly decentralised, since it is run by the municipalities. In addition, both independently run - and publicly- run preschools exist.¹⁴ One might think that this diversity could lead to significant differences in the amount of resources devoted to preschools (between richer and poorer municipalities) and in the financial efforts by parents. However, this is not the case. In Sweden, there are no significant quality differences between the preschools run by different municipalities, and the fact that a preschool is independently- or publicly-run does not seem to lead to any differences. There are also no differences in the fees paid by the parents, since these are regulated at national level. This commitment to high quality equal standards is a sensible policy, since it prevents phenomena such as 'bussing' of preschool children in search of 'better quality' preschools.

f) Inspection can be a valuable tool to improve pedagogic practice and not something to be feared, provided that it can be assured that minimum quality standards have been achieved nation-wide by law. It can also help to ensure that conditions are fairly homogeneous across the country.

4.3.2. In relation to the content and organisation of preschool education

g) The integration of education and care in pre-schooling seems to bring good results and is fully coherent with the idea of having integrated settings for 1- to 5-year olds until the children start pre-school class or compulsory school.

h) High quality preschool education starts with highly qualified staff. The average level of qualifications of the Swedish preschool staff testifies of this. The profession of preschool teacher requires the same level of university education –and carries the same status– as the profession of teacher of compulsory or upper secondary school.

i) Quality of the material provision is of paramount importance. As obvious as this might sound, this is not be underestimated –in Sweden, a preschool is a place where children enjoy different, well-equipped indoor spaces for different types of activities, and the outdoors environment can be as important as the indoors one.

j) Preschool can have its own curriculum, and it can be conceived as a guidance tool and one that does not necessarily have to be focused on 'academic results'. The Swedish preschool approach, characterised by a child-centred pedagogy and the creation of the best possible conditions for a rich and varied social and individual development, seems to

¹³ This is a very political question in Sweden.

¹⁴ This is not the case for compulsory schools, the vast majority of which are publicly run.

bring good results. Within this approach, children are not subject to individual assessment, but this is done rather at the level of the group. This also allows for introducing innovations in the pedagogic practice. The Cluster was informed of the governmental plans to strengthen the educational emphasis of preschools. The pre-school can then be better able to prepare children for school. In concrete terms, this means that the objectives in the preschool curriculum are to be made clearer, particularly when it comes to children's linguistic and mathematical development. This change is somehow driven by the PISA results for 15-year olds. However, in a broader European context, Sweden does not perform particularly bad in international comparisons, certainly not when compared to the other members of the Cluster, and notwithstanding that the Cluster did not take a stance on this reform, the general feeling was that the overall education system produces very good results.

k) At preschool level, emphasis on social competences and the fostering of self-esteem are very positive. These aspects of the Swedish preschool model drew a lot of attention from the cluster members, e.g. the focus on what children are good at as a way to nurture the development of self-esteem and individual talents, as well as later attitudes to learning. Of course preschool in Sweden is not only about this, but it is one of its key factor.

l) The development of language competences is a crucial task for preschools, particularly for children of migrant background, and it can be done in full respect of the children's individual characteristics. In practice, this means implementing a real commitment to multilingualism. The learning of and identification with the main language of instruction, Swedish, does not have to enter into contradiction with the fact that many pupils possess a different mother tongue: on the contrary, they should support each other, as the best way of ensuring the acquisition of the full range of verbal skills. The child's self-esteem, sense of belonging and personality development also seem to benefit from this approach. Although causal links cannot be established, in the broader European context Sweden does not seem to particularly suffer from problems in relation to the disaffection of youth of immigrant background to the country in which they live. Immigrant pupils also perform better, on average, than in many other EU countries –and perhaps the fact that most of them have attended a preschool that monitored closely their linguistic development has something to do with that.

m) Since parental involvement is of crucial importance, it is worth making efforts to ensure that it happens even under difficult circumstances. That parental involvement is important is not something that the Cluster learnt in Sweden –this is known everywhere. But in Sweden, the cluster could observe how efforts were made in order to involve parents even in very difficult circumstances, e.g. through the use of interpreters or by providing parents themselves with courses meaningful to them in the school premises. So-called 'personal development dialogues' allow parents to keep track of the development of their child at the preschool or other educational institutions.

n) Personalised attention is the key. In a small-scale system (preschools tend to be relatively small), with low staff-pupil ratios, and highly qualified staff, it is possible to keep all children together and to cater for special needs within the mainstream education system. This seems to be the case in Sweden.

4.3.3. In relation to the content and organisation of out-of-school childcare

o) School (or preschool) and out of-school childcare need to be complementary and part of the same pedagogic project, but not the same thing. In Sweden, the cluster observed how, somehow, the 'spirit' of the Swedish preschool is perpetuated at compulsory school level through out of-school childcare activities. Here, again, the focus is on social competences, on self-development and on nurturing the child's talents and curiosity. If needed, some children get extra support to catch up with formal lessons –but contrary to what the cluster observed in other PLAs, the intention is never to give children 'more of the same'.

p) Well-thought out of-school childcare can be especially important for socially disadvantaged children. In Hjulsta, in particular, the Cluster witnessed an impressive range of out of-school childcare activities that were clearly considered as much an important mission of the school as the formal lessons, if not more. From learning to read and write in the child's mother tongue to being able to comfort the child's fellow students through music and massage, the development of social and individual competences through out of-school activities has a greater importance for these children. In addition, the fact that out of-school activities take place within the same school premises where pupils participate in formal education in the mornings entails some advantages –children do not have to spend time travelling from one place to another. For families, it is financially beneficial, and it also helps to create stronger links between schools and the wider community.

4.3.4. In relation to previous work of the Cluster

q) Effective segregation does not necessarily lead to bad quality education. This is a particularly relevant lesson for the Cluster. In Sweden, the Cluster found that segregation also exists, and it is very evident. However, without entering in the debate of whether this can be prevented or not, it was clear that quality education could also be provided in segregated settings. Certainly, this is not something that can happen from scratch. The whole education system needs to be built around the objective of providing quality education for all, at all levels. In fact, probably the good work of the Swedish preschools is one of the reasons, among others, why even at secondary education level segregated settings are able to provide high quality education.

r) High quality preschool education and out of-school childcare can be effective ways of preventing early school leaving. This is a 'lesson' that perhaps is not obvious from this PLA, but in the light of existing research and after having visited schools (and preschools) with difficult social conditions in Sweden, the Cluster is in a position to draw the attention to the importance of also focusing on these two aspects of the education system in order to comprehensively tackle the issue of early school leaving. **Focus alone on the compulsory (and formal) school education system would probably not suffice.**

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ANNEX 1 – KEY EDUCATION INDICATORS FOR SWEDEN

Benchmarks indicators:

		Sweden		EU 27 average	
Reference period		2000	2006	2000	2006
Ratio of low achieving 15-year olds in reading literacy		12.6	13.3 (2003)	19.4	19.8 (2003)
Share of early school leavers (age 18-24), %		7.7	12.0	17.6	15.4
Upper secondary completion rate (age 20-24)		85.2	86.5	76.6	77.8
Tertiary graduates in maths, science, and technology	Increase %	2000-05:	+18	2000-05:	+27
	Share of females %	32.1	33.8 (2005)	30.8	31.2 (2005)
Adult participation in lifelong learning, (age 25-64)		21.6	32.1 (b) (2005)	7.1	9.6 (b)

b= break in series

- Sweden is in **most benchmarks** performing **above EU level**. As regards progress the situation is mixed, some areas are advancing while high performance areas stagnate or fall behind.
- The **ratio of low achieving pupils** in Sweden has according to the OECD PISA study increased slightly since 2000 but is still clearly below EU average.
- **The share of early school leavers** in Sweden is below the EU average (and already near the EU benchmark), but it has deteriorated by more than 4 percentage points since 2000. **The upper secondary completion rate** in Sweden is above the EU average and already surpasses the EU benchmark.
- Sweden has a relatively high tertiary participation and attainment rate and a higher number of tertiary **MST graduates per 1000 inhabitants** (20-29) than EU 27. Furthermore the female share is above EU average and gender balance has further improved since 2000.

- **Lifelong learning participation** in Sweden is above the EU average and it has progressed more in the last 5 years (comparisons between years are however limited because of breaks in series).

Other key indicators

Reference period	2000	2005	2000	2005
Participation in pre-school education, 4 year olds	72.8	88.9	82.8	85.7
% of adults with tertiary education level (age 25-64)	28	31	20	23
Public investment in education, % of GDP	7.31	7.35 (2004)	4.68	5.09 (2004)

- **Participation in pre-primary education** in Sweden has increased considerably since 2000 and is now above EU average.
- **Tertiary attainment** of the adult population is one of the highest in the EU.

Public spending on education as a % of GDP in Sweden is the second highest in Europe (after Denmark). However, the high spending level didn't increase further since 2000.

