

Schools and education

General election day, September 17th, is the day when Sweden's future is to be decided, and it will be up to you and me to cast our vote. We all share the same responsibilities, and all votes are equal. Should we further and improve our welfare system, or should we downgrade by taking one out of every five tax krona out of the public coffers? Should we continue developing the Swedish welfare model – or should we abandon it?

For us, the Social Democrats, the importance of providing schoolchildren with sufficient knowledge to enable them to make their way into the labour market and out in society is self-evident. Knowledge is what enables people to develop and shape their own lives. That's why education must never be allowed to be reserved for a privileged few. If Sweden is to be able to offer equal opportunities and a fair chance for everyone, high-quality education is essential.

All schools must be good schools

In our view, it's not good enough that nine out of ten children who leave compulsory school today are qualified for further studies at upper-secondary level. By increasing the number of teachers in schools, we can ensure that the pupils will receive all the support they need in order to attain their educational objectives. Our commitment to providing schools with 15,000 more teachers and other educational specialists is well on track and will be fully implemented during the course of 2006.

Schools where conditions are tough need extra support. During the coming years, an initial 225 million kronor will be put into the schools facing the greatest difficulties. Among other things, these funds will be used for reading and language training for pupils with non-Swedish backgrounds, both in Swedish and in the pupil's mother tongue. Priority will be given to cooperation between home and school. The next step will be to provide the 100 schools where conditions are toughest with sufficient funding to employ 1,000 teachers and educational specialists.



Educational development and diversity will be encouraged in all schools. Although independent schools may serve as a complement to municipal schools, the establishment of new independent schools must not lead to a fall-off in the education available to children at municipal schools. Segregation risks will be carefully assessed before an independent school can be approved, and the local authorities will be given a much greater say in the sort of independent schools that can be set up. Every tax krona put into schools must be used for the education of the pupils. Schools run in the form of a limited company will only qualify for public subsidies if the profits are ploughed back into the school in order to improve the services it offers.

No child left behind

No girl or boy must be left behind at school. Children are all different, and there are many ways of learning, but everyone has the same right to knowledge. That's why it's important that pupils and parents are provided with clear information on the child's scholastic progress. Follow-up procedures for keeping track of pupils' progress at compulsory school will be made more efficient. Since 1st January, 2006, all compulsory school pupils have been entitled to an individual development plan from the start of grade one. Each individual development plan, which is drawn up with the assistance of the pupil and his or her parents, must indicate exactly what is needed for the pupil to attain his or her educational objectives. Individual development plans must be regularly monitored by the school.

To enable teachers to determine in time whether a pupil needs extra support, the National Agency for Education has been instructed to develop diagnostic tests in reading and mathematics.

A modern upper-secondary school

We, the Social Democrats, do not consider it good enough that 85 percent of all 22-year-olds have received a three-year upper-secondary education. We are therefore providing more support for students who struggle to get along in upper-secondary school. We're also putting extra resources into developing and improving individual upper-secondary study programmes. All students participating in an individual programme will be given all the support they need in order to take on and finish a national study programme. We're also improving vocationally-oriented study programmes. A new, up-to-date upper-secondary apprenticeship training scheme is to be introduced; there will be greater coordination between core subjects and vocational subjects, and regional initiatives will be encouraged for cooperation between local authorities and the parties on the labour market.

The alternative

Against the Social Democratic educational policies stand the Moderates and their right-wing allies. They propose introducing school ability tests and permitting assessments of seven-year-old children similar to



grades. How will branding someone as incapable from an early age ever encourage him or her to learn? In a Sweden run by the right-wing alliance, not every child will enjoy a natural right to a decent education.

The Moderate-dominated right-wing alliance also wants to abolish upper-secondary individual study programmes and lower the sights for students attending vocationally-oriented study programmes. The right-wing alliance wants to meet the challenges of the future by classic right-wing sorting and screening policies, which will lead to greater social discrepancies, lower educational and learning targets and weakened competitive ability.

In our Sweden, everyone is welcome. Which Sweden will you choose?

