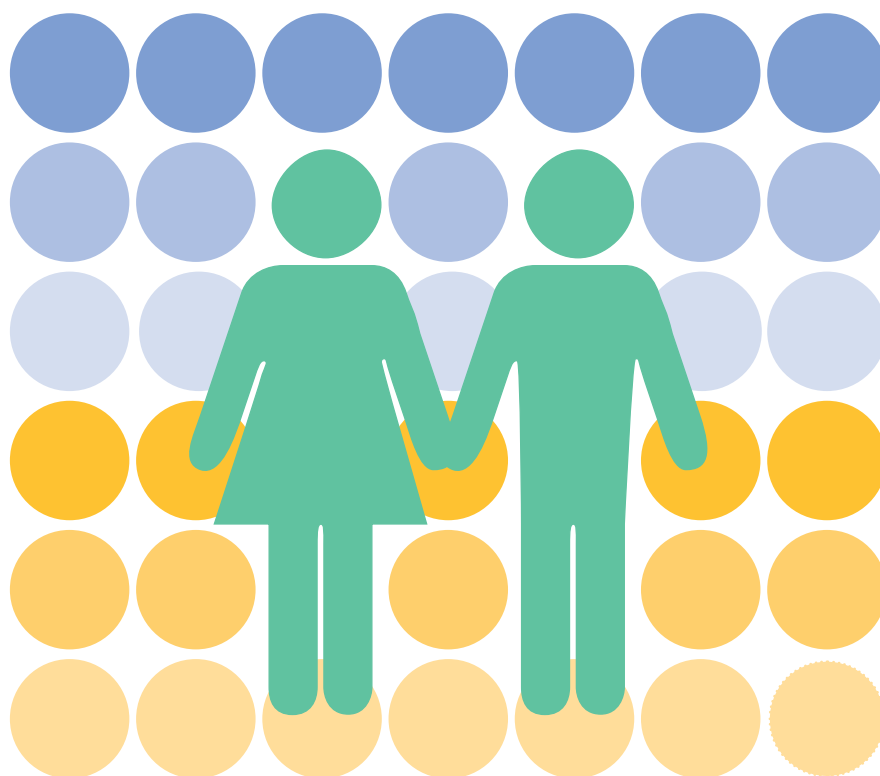


A R B E T S M I L J Ö

STATISTIK

report 2006:3E



## Pupils' Environment in Schools

– A Survey, Autumn 2005, of Children Born in 1994



# Pupils' Environment in Schools

- A Survey, Autumn 2005, of Children Born in 1994

**Enquiries**

Helena Ouchterlony, tel. +46 8 730 97 13, [helena.ouchterlony@av.se](mailto:helena.ouchterlony@av.se)

Marie Norell, tel. +46 8 730 95 57, [marie.norell@av.se](mailto:marie.norell@av.se)

This report and other material can be accessed on [www.av.se](http://www.av.se)

Series: Arbetsmiljöstatistik

Publisher under Swedish law: Barbro Köhler Krantz, Head of Supervision

Statistical editor: Elisabet Broberg, Head of Division

English translation: Roger Tanner, Ordväxlingen AB

Published in March 2007

ISSN 1652-1110

## Preface

Schools, a priority sector in the Swedish Work Environment Authority's programme of activities for 2004–2006, are defined as education provided by municipalities under their own auspices and also independent schools. The Authority's prioritisation includes all employees – teachers, school management and other staff – and pupils from grade zero of compulsory school up to and including high school (“upper secondary school”).

The work environment in the employment sector is investigated in biennial work environment surveys conducted by Statistics Sweden on the Swedish Work Environment Authority's behalf. These surveys supplement the Labour Force Survey and focus on employees aged between 16 and 64. Pupils are not included.

A separate work environment survey has therefore been undertaken, addressed to pupils and taking the form of a questionnaire for pupils who were born in 1994 and were thus about 11 years old when they completed the form in November–December 2005. Eleven-year-olds were chosen because they are a group seldom consulted in other questionnaire surveys but are big enough to fill out questionnaire forms.

The work was done by a project group headed by Helena Ouchterlony. The National Agency for Education and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions were contacted as work proceeded. In contrast to previous studies in the school sector, the sample was directly composed of pupils, not classes. To identify the schools attended by individual pupils, the majority of Sweden's municipalities were consulted and promptly supplied the names and addresses of the schools concerned. The questionnaire form was tested in the spring term 2005 by grade 4 pupils at Rotsunda School, Sollentuna.

This report was compiled by Helena Ouchterlony and Marie Norell. Diagrams and layout are by Katarina Lindman. The pictures were drawn by grade 5 pupils at Maria Elementar School, Stockholm. The project group also included Robert Linder and Jan Weiner.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket)

*Elisabet Broberg*



# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
Questionnaire survey	10
What we now know	11
The head teacher questionnaire	11
Attitude survey	11
Children's Ombudsman's contacts with children	12
Reported accidents	12
Legislation on pupils' work environment	12
Interpreting the findings	13
References	14
<b>The organisational and psychosocial work environment</b>	<b>16</b>
Satisfaction	16
Bullying, menaces and violence	17
Workload, support and recovery	21
Pupil participation	23
References	24
<b>The physical work environment in school</b>	<b>26</b>
Cleaning	26
The air	27
Noise	29
References	31
<b>Health and accidents</b>	<b>33</b>
Allergy	33
School health care	34
Accidents	36
References	39
<b>Brief technical description</b>	<b>40</b>
Questionnaire design	40
Pilot survey	40
Data collection	40
Non-response	41
Sources of error	41
References	42

## Summary

In the autumn of 2005 the Swedish Work Environment Authority carried out a questionnaire survey of pupils born in 1994. The purpose of the survey was to map the pupils' perception of their school environment, and the findings are intended for use as input planning data for the Authority's supervisory activity, but also as input data for other national authorities and policy-makers. The subject fields covered by the questionnaire are the organisational and psychosocial work environment, the physical work environment in school and health and accidents.

The questionnaire findings show many of the pupils to have a positive image of school. They are happy there and are supported and encouraged in their school work. At the same time the study shows 8 per cent of the children to have felt victimised at some time or other during the term and one out of three pupils to have had difficulty at some time or other in settling down to work, due to the noise level prevailing during lessons. The majority are quite satisfied with school facilities, but just under one-third reply that the toilets are not always clean. More than half the pupils have injured themselves in school at some time during the term.

This study has not revealed any major differences in the way the school environment is perceived by girls and boys respectively.



## Introduction

The Swedish Work Environment Authority is actively concerned with reducing the risks of ill-health and accidents in working life and with improving the work environment in a holistic perspective. This also includes pupils and their work environment in school. To enable the Authority to plan and follow up this activity, sound statistical data are essential. School is the workplace of about 125,000 teachers and some 1,500,000 pupils, divided between 4,963 compulsory and 763 upper secondary schools (high schools) (1). No comprehensive picture exists at present of pupils' experience of the work environment in school or of the nature of health problems connected with that environment (2).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Sweden has adopted and pledged itself to comply with, lays down among other things the right of children to a hearing in matters affecting them and of respect for their views in accordance with their age and maturity (Article 12, paragraph 1).

### Questionnaire survey

In order to gain a picture of pupils' perception of their work environment in school, the Swedish Work Environment Authority constructed a questionnaire form addressed to 11-year-old pupils and containing questions about the physical and mental work environment in school, access to school health care, accidents and perceived discomforts. The questionnaire was distributed to schools at the beginning of November 2005, and the answers given were to refer to conditions during the current term. The sample consisted of 1,600 randomly selected children born in 1994. The questionnaire response rate was 84 per cent. Of the 1,338 respondents, 93 per cent are in grade 5 of compulsory school and 51 per cent are girls. 94 per cent of the pupils attend municipal schools, the remainder independent schools. Between them the respondents represent 245 municipalities.

## What we now know

### The head teacher questionnaire

Between 1991 and 2001 the Swedish Work Environment Authority distributed four questionnaires to all head teachers, asking them about the school work environment (3). Part of the purpose was to see what issues had been raised during safety tours of inspection or suchlike during the year and what issues the head teachers considered most important to address during the year.

Comparison of the commonest physical work environment deficiencies remarked on during the 1990s in safety inspection tours etc., year by year

1991	1992	1996	2001
Ventilation	Ventilation	Ventilation	Ventilation
Heat, cold	Heat, cold	Heat, cold	Heat, cold
Noise	Deficient maintenance of premises	Noise	Outdoor environment
Deficient maintenance of premises	Noise	Deficient maintenance of premises	Cleaning, dust

Deficiencies of indoor climate, cleaning and noise were frequently mentioned during safety inspection tours in the 1990s.

The areas which the head teacher considered most in need of attention in the 2001 survey were the outdoor environment, pupils' social areas, teaching premises, cleaning, staff facilities, ergonomically designed work furniture for the pupils, noise and acoustics.

### Attitude survey

In 2003 the National Agency for Education carried out a survey of attitudes to school among pupils in grades 4–6, the main concern being to ascertain whether schools were achieving their objectives (4). Some of the questions touch on the Swedish Work Environment Authority's supervisory sphere. Where similar questions have been asked, comparisons have been made between the results obtained by the two authorities. We have made comparisons with the replies received by the National Agency for Education from pupils in grade 5. One structural difference between the studies is that the National Agency for Education survey included all pupils in 146 randomly selected classes, whereas the Swedish Work Environment Authority sample comprised 1,600 randomly selected individuals born in 1994.

### **Children's Ombudsman's contacts with children**

The Office of the Children's Ombudsman is tasked with representing the rights of children and young persons and keeps in regular touch with children and young persons to find out their opinions on current issues, as well as circulating questionnaires to a number of contact classes.

In the Ombudsman's interviews with children, the children have been asked what they consider the most important things for politicians to work for in schools (5). Most important, in the children's opinion, were the following:

- for schools to combat bullying,
- for good food to be served in school,
- for school premises to be pleasant,
- for stress to be reduced,
- for adults to be on hand when extra help is needed, and
- for pupils to participate in school decision-making.

### **Reported accidents**

If an accident or other harmful occurrence at school has resulted in loss of life or serious injury or has affected several employees/pupils, it is the employer's duty, under Section 2 of the Work Environment Ordinance, to report the matter without delay to the Swedish Work Environment Authority. (See chapter on legislation.)

During the period between 2003 and 2005, a total of 131 reports were filed concerning pupils aged 10 or 11. Falls are the commonest occurrence, mainly in the school playground.

### **Legislation on pupils' work environment**

School activities are governed by educational legislation and work environment legislation. The latter applies to all employees and pupils. School legislation applies to all municipal schools, and independent schools must have corresponding activities.

Together these rules are intended to give schools a good educational and work environment. The school employer must show consideration of the needs and wishes of pupils and staff and devise solutions which will benefit all groups. Hence the importance of a holistic view of schools.

The Work Environment Act lays down that the work environment

must be such that pupils and staff will not risk being made ill or injuring themselves at work. To achieve this, schools need to have effective, systematic work environment management. Ultimate responsibility for the school work environment rests with the municipality or, in the case of independent schools, the governing body. Most often these bodies delegate work environment management to the school management, which is required to carry on work environment management in partnership with the staff and pupils. This work must include both the physical and the psychosocial work environment. The head teacher in turn may allocate work environment tasks, e.g. to teachers.

Systematic work environment management (6) means investigating the risks entailed by the operation, assessing them, remedying deficiencies and following matters up. When changes are being made to the operation, the risks of ill-health at work must be assessed and remedied before any change is made.

If an accident or other harmful occurrence at school has resulted in loss of life or serious injury or has affected several employees/pupils, it is the employer's duty to contact the Swedish Work Environment Authority without delay. The same applies concerning incidents which could have had serious consequences for life and health. Rules on this subject are contained in Section 2 of the Work Environment Ordinance.

Mental injury – shock, for example – can also count as an accident. Severe personal injuries can also include injuries due to organisational and social factors and resulting from repeated offences, e.g. bullying. In the case of bullying and suchlike occurrences, individual incidents capable of causing severe personal injury must be reported. Schools sometimes have difficulty in telling what should be reported. Whenever there is uncertainty on this point, the wisest course is to get in touch with the Swedish Work Environment Authority and let them decide whether or not the matter is to be reported.

## Interpreting the findings

The chapters on findings conform to the subject fields addressed in the questionnaire. For each of these, a description is provided of the rules and statutory instruments applying to the school work environment. The results of the questionnaire survey are presented on the basis of the children's replies to the questionnaire, which often take in several ques-

tions at once. The comparisons made are based on the answers given by girls and boys respectively. The differences presented in the report are statistically reliable.\* Comparisons are also made with the report by the National Agency for Education concerning pupils' attitudes to school (4). Further facts concerning the structure of the study will be found in the chapter headed Brief technical description. The results not shown here will be found in a separate appendix of tables.

## References

1. Aktuellt om skola och barnomsorg.  
Augusti 2005, Sveriges kommuner och landsting.
2. Elevers ohälsa – hur mäter vi den? 2002, rapport från Skolverket.
3. Skolans arbetsmiljö – resultat av enkätundersökning våren 2002.  
Arbetsmiljöverket rapport 2002:10.
4. Yngre elevers attityder till skolan 2003. Skolverket.
5. Vem bryr sig? Barnombudsmannens årsrapport 2003.
6. Systematiskt arbetsmiljöarbete – en vägledning.  
H347, Arbetsmiljöverket.

\* The 95 per cent confidence intervals for girls and boys respectively do not overlap.































































