



Meld. St. 6 (2019–2020) Early intervention and inclusive education in kindergartens, schools and out-of-school-hours care

1 More inclusive kindergartens, schools and out-of-school-hours care

1.1 Introduction

All children deserve a good start in life. Children and young people must be able to learn, play, develop and feel a sense of achievement. A safe setting is important. Children who feel secure and happy learn better.

Knowledge gives every child the opportunity to develop their talents in the best possible way and to live independent lives. Knowledge is also key to social progress and the very basis for democracy, value creation and well-being. Good kindergartens and schools that empower all children irrespective of background are vital in creating a society with few inequalities and equal opportunities for all.

A sustainable welfare state requires more people to participate in the labour force and more people to work for longer. The government is therefore investing in education and knowledge for all. Early intervention and inclusive practices are key to ensuring that all children and young people can realise their dreams and ambitions. It is the government's goal for all children and young people to be given equal opportunities for all-round development and learning, irrespective of background and individual circumstances. We want an education system that allows everyone to feel a sense of achievement and experience the value of knowledge and community.

Kindergartens and schools should light the spark that children and young people need in order to develop and learn, make a good life for themselves and prepare themselves for study and work. The national curriculum sets out five basic skills: reading, writing, numeracy, oral skills and digital skills. The goal is for all pupils to have mastered these basic skills by the time they leave compulsory education. We know that failure to do so has a significant impact on whether or not they complete upper secondary education or training. By 2030 the government wants to see 90 per cent of students enrolling in upper secondary education or training pass and complete.^[1] One important step on the way to reaching this goal is for 5,000 more students to complete upper secondary education or training every year up until 2025.

Kindergartens and schools should help children and young people feel secure and happy. Children and young people spend a large part of their childhood and adolescence in kindergarten, school and out-of-school-hours care (SFO). There they will experience ups and downs. They fall and hurt themselves, they quarrel and they struggle. They learn to climb to the top of the tree, they crack the reading code, they achieve and they make friends for life. Kindergartens, schools and out-of-school-hours care (SFO) should create good frameworks for all-round development. Children and pupils should be met with clear expectations and given help to deal with both success and failure. They must have adults around them who provide support and care, whether they need help to find friends, participate in play or learn to read, write and do sums and understand the society we live in. Children and pupils are given the best chance to develop socially and academically if they feel they are a valuable part of society and accepted for who they are. They must feel that they belong and that they, their perspectives and their opinions are needed.

The state has a particular responsibility for protecting Sami children's well-being as well as their religious, cultural and linguistic rights. The Sami and Norwegian languages have equal status. The Education Act regulates the right to a Sami education. The act confers the right to instruction in Lule Sami, South Sami and North Sami.^[2]

Children who need it are entitled to special educational support, irrespective of whether or not they are enrolled in kindergarten. Pupils who do not or cannot benefit sufficiently from mainstream education are entitled to special needs support. Pupils with Sign Language as their first language and pupils who are deemed to require such instruction following an expert assessment are entitled to instruction in and through Sign Language. There are additional rights for children and pupils from national minorities, minority language children and pupils, and children and pupils who require alternative and supplementary communication.

Employees must possess the necessary skills and forge close relationships with the children and pupils if we are to provide an inclusive and good education for all. Working with the local support system, kindergartens and schools must be prepared to deal with the diversity that exists amongst the children and pupils. Local support systems may include the pedagogical psychology service, child health centres and school health services. Kindergartens, schools and the support system should work together to offer services to children and young people with different needs. One common denominator for the key initiatives outlined in this white paper is that they seek to bring the available expertise closer to the children and pupils. To achieve this, the government will be investing in professional development in kindergartens, schools and the pedagogical psychology service and in improving co-operation between kindergartens, schools, out-of-school-hours care and the local support system.

Goals for sustainable development

Education is a priority for the government both domestically and in relation to development policy. Together with all UN member countries, Norway has adopted 17 goals for sustainable development in the period leading up to 2030, and we have drawn up an action plan to eradicate poverty, fight inequality and stop climate change. An inclusive, equitable and good education for all is an important element in this plan.

Early intervention, inclusion and well adapted provision are fundamental principles for the government's work to improve our education system. In recent years the government has taken major steps to enable kindergartens and schools to offer opportunities for all, cf. e.g. White Paper 19 (2015–2016) Time for Play and Learning – better content in kindergarten and White Paper 21 (2016–2017) Desire to Learn – early intervention and quality in schools:

- The new Framework Plan for Kindergartens clarifies kindergartens' obligations, responsibilities and roles as well as the rights of parents.
- The new core staff ratio for kindergartens sets a minimum requirement of one adult per three children under the age of three and one adult per six children over the age of three.
- The lowering of the teacher-to-child ratio means there must be at least one pedagogical leader for every seven children under the age of three and at least one pedagogical leader for every fourteen children over the age of three. The children are regarded as being 3 years of age from August onwards in the year of their third birthday.
- Discount schemes and free core time enable more people to send their children to kindergarten.
- The regional scheme for professional development in kindergartens and the decentralised scheme for professional development in schools help boost local quality development initiatives.
- The supervision scheme ensures that municipalities which have seen poor results in key areas of education over time are offered support and guidance.
- The Research Council of Norway has been tasked with allocating grants for research into the effects of measures for improving quality in kindergartens and schools.
- Municipalities are now obliged to offer intensive tuition to pupils falling behind in reading, writing or numeracy in Years 1–4.
- More teaching specialists are helping to create additional career paths in schools and strengthen the professional learning community.
- The duty of kindergartens and schools to co-operate and the obligation of schools and other municipal services to co-operate are improving coherence between the different services.
- Primary and lower secondary teacher training programmes are now five-year master's programmes.
- Much investment has gone into continuing education for teachers.
- The statutory pupil-to-teacher ratio stipulates that there must be no more than 15 pupils per teacher in Years 1–4 and no more than 20 pupils per teacher in Years 5–10.

The government takes the view that these and a raft of other ongoing measures will help reinforce the good progress being made in kindergartens and schools. This white paper builds on and reinforces the policies that the government has pursued to date. It also continues to build on the knowledge base cited in the aforementioned white papers. For that reason this white paper primarily cites information from new reports, in particular the reports Inclusive education for children and young people by the expert panel on children and young people with special needs (the Nordahl Report) and NOU 2019: 3 New opportunities – better learning. Gender differences in school performance and educational pathways by the Stoltenberg Commission. When preparing this white paper we assessed the Nordahl Report in its entirety along with some of the proposals contained in the Stoltenberg Commission's report. Other proposals made by the Stoltenberg Commission will be addressed in other processes. The national evaluation of out-of-school-hours care (SFO) Play, learning and non-pedagogy for all has also provided important input, especially for the section on SFO. The report from the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) ^[3] from the first evaluation of Norway's overall effort in terms of inclusion has also informed this white paper, see box 1.2.

This white paper is primarily about kindergartens, primary and lower secondary schools and SFO, but many of the measures also apply to upper secondary schools. The support systems working with kindergartens and schools are also addressed in the white paper. Many of the measures described in the paper will also affect adults entitled to education and training. The white paper concerns kindergarten, education and training provision for all children and young people, regardless of background and aptitude for learning.

1.2 Unacceptable disparities in quality

Many kindergartens and schools are inclusive and look after their children and pupils in a good way. Kindergartens and schools have made good progress in many areas in recent years. Yet there are still challenges that must be tackled. Not all children and pupils receive the help they need. Many get help too late and are met with low expectations. This means that many children and pupils are not being heard and understood, and they develop and learn less than they could have done with better adapted provision. This is a serious matter. These children and pupils may not feel safe and happy in kindergarten or school and find that they are not seen as a valuable part of the community.