

# INTERNATIONELLA ENGELSKA SKOLAN

## Quality Report 2022/2023





*"We want to give every student the possibility to meet high academic expectations and to navigate through an international environment, whatever their background."*



## CONTENTS

*Quality report  
2022/2023*

Head of education: "Quality is what makes our schools the first choice"	4
IES in short	6
Message from the CEO: "The IES ethos is just as relevant today as it was 30 years ago – and will remain so in the future"	8
Structured processes to ensure and improve quality	11
IES Jönköping: "I have progressed from problem-solver to leader"	20
IES Eskilstuna: "Your background does not define who you are"	22
IES Östersund: "When grit isn't enough I switch to sisu"	25
Primary years and fritids: "We lay the foundation for lifelong learning"	26
IES celebrates 30 years	28
Barbara Bergström: "Proud to have changed the lives of so many students"	30
Generation Alpha: "New demands on schools with students who are hyper-individualistic and have social media lifestyles"	33
Focus on more reading: "Our task is to develop reading proficiency"	34
Teacher of the Year: "Important to build a relationship with your class"	36
IES organisation: A stimulating environment for teachers	38
Researcher: "Sweden has one of the most equitable education systems in the OECD"	42

# QUALITY REPORT FOR INTERNATIONELLA ENGELSKA SKOLAN 2022–2023

Welcome to Internationella Engelska Skolan's quality report covering the 2022-2023 academic year.

IES was founded 30 years ago as an organisation based on respect for our students and an aspiration to provide a school life that equips them with the best possible tools for adulthood – in the form of both knowledge and social skills. Every student must be given the chance to reach their full potential, irrespective of their background. Succeeding in this objective is our primary measure of quality.

We have worked systematically with our quality processes over many years so that we can analyse our progress and identify where there is room for improvement. These processes have been developed and refined throughout the three decades we've been operating. Since the 2020-2021 academic year we have summarised our work in this annual quality report.

We have grown continuously ever since we were established in 1993 and we are currently one of the largest independent schools in Sweden, with 46 schools and 32,000 students. One of the reasons for our success is that we see to the needs of each individual, and never give up on any student. Those who need support should be supported, and those who need to be challenged should be challenged.

Our organisation is founded on three strong principles that together form our ethos, in other words, our convictions. One of these is to have high academic expectations of every student. Another is to give the students an opportunity not only to learn English, but to gain such a good command of the language that they can continue to study and work in English – the key to the world. We also constantly strive to create a safe and calm environment that fosters learning.

As our organisation enters its fourth decade, we continue our efforts to continuously improve quality and become an even better school for our students. Schools fulfil one of the most important functions in society, and a high level of quality in schooling is essential to our children's future prospects.

*Robin Kirk Johansson, head of education:*

## **"QUALITY IS WHAT MAKES OUR SCHOOLS THE FIRST CHOICE"**

"A high level of quality in our schools requires attention to every detail." So says Robin Kirk Johansson, head of education at IES. "Our policy is to link academic work with student care to create a culture where the students' best is the basis for everything we do and an approach that every student is everybody's student and responsibility."

"The thing that distinguishes a good, high-quality school is that school life is a positive spring-board into adulthood. To succeed in this, it is fundamental that students gain knowledge through gifted teachers who are able to interact with different individuals in the right way for the specific student – and in a safe and calm environment that enables learning," according to Ms Kirk Johansson.



"We have been developing processes to ensure quality within our operations ever since the beginning thirty years ago, but this work has become more and more structured over the years," she says.

"An important step was taken in 2008 when we introduced our annual quality surveys for students, teachers and parents, and these have formed the foundation of our quality improvement activities ever since. We use input from the responses to measure both hard value, in other words academic results, and soft value, i.e. how the school environment is perceived, and then focus on identifying effective ways to address any shortcomings.

"We've also been using a new tool called the academic dashboard for the past couple of years, which enables both IES as an organisation and our schools to view and compare grading and monitor results at an individual level. This helps us to rapidly provide support to individual students and ensure integrity in grading in every school."

### **WHAT ARE THE CURRENT QUALITY GOALS AT IES?**

"First and foremost to constantly grow the proportion of students who qualify for upper secondary school; and for

our own upper secondary school the goal is to give more students the chance to study at university. Our second goal is to constantly perform better in the national tests and always strive for integrity in grading. The national tests are the best independent knowledge indicators we have in Sweden – and we always want to be better than the national average. It's important that the results of these tests correlate well with the final grades we set. These are becoming increasingly consistent, which is very positive.

"Furthermore, our goal is that more parents, employees and above all students recommend us. For us to succeed, our students must enjoy going to school, think the lessons are interesting and appreciate their teachers – this is the ultimate proof of quality in what we do.

"For parents, quality means receiving information continuously about whether their children enjoy school and how well they are performing. The monthly mentor conversations are very important in this. But in-person meetings are also important, which means getting parents to visit the schools. Due to the pandemic many of them have become used to digital meetings and it's been difficult to convince them back since then. That's a goal for us going forward.

"For teachers, quality means feeling that they develop in their work, have career opportunities and receive support from management, teaching colleagues and other staff."

### **WHICH FACTORS DOES IES SEE AS MOST IMPORTANT FOR ACHIEVING QUALITY?**

"The single most important thing is clear, strong leadership. ▶



The principals of our schools are our cultural ambassadors and are responsible for making sure that the organisation lives up to our quality standards. To ensure this we have a thorough selection process for appointing principals, and we consider both internal and external candidates, plus we have comprehensive training for principals. They have to know what we mean by quality and how it should be achieved. We put a lot of effort into helping the principals in different ways. For instance, we've created a quality calendar so that they can see what and when they're meant to do something related to the formal quality work during the academic year.

"The structure of IES has always been built on teams with clear leaders. As an example, teaching teams have a subject leader to support the other teachers in the subject, this is the head of department. The teachers of each year are also organised under a leader, the head of year.

"It's also about leadership in the classroom and corridors. I'm convinced that the presence of strong adults and clear rules creates a sense of safety for the students, and safety creates enjoyment. It's also important for each student to feel seen and appreciated. Everybody needs to feel liked.

"To achieve quality we must pay attention to every detail, create a culture where academics is interwoven with student care, and where the students' best guides everything we do. Every student must be everybody's student and responsibility."

#### **WHAT ARE THE GOALS FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT GOING FORWARD?**

"Ensuring integrity in grading is something we constantly work with, it is so important to our students' future.

"We must also become even clearer in our definition of great teaching. As the education provider operating schools we do not want to decide what happens in the classroom, but we must provide our teachers with tools and ideas to help them develop their teaching – it's a science, but it's also an art. When we visit the classrooms during our quality rounds, we see many examples of engaging teaching and fantastic teachers. It's important to share these so that they can inspire colleagues. Teachers and the classroom teaching of students form the backbone of IES and are our main strength. The thing we are most recognised for is probably our order and structure, but these are simply hygiene factors that lay the foundation for good teaching and create the best possible conditions for learning.

When I was the principal of the IES school in Borås I was once asked by a student what I did all day long. I had to think before I then replied: "I dedicate my entire time, every day, to giving you the best school day that day." As head of education this is still my goal. //





## WE PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE WORLD

IES is currently the largest operator of independent schools within the Swedish compulsory education system. In autumn 2023, we had 32,000 students in 45 compulsory schools, from Trelleborg in the south to Skellefteå in the north, as well as one upper secondary school. We operate bilingual schools that follow the Swedish national curriculum.

*Three major convictions define life in our schools*

## WHAT WE STAND FOR

### **Command of English**

English is a global language and learning to command both the Swedish and English languages at an early age becomes hugely advantageous later in life. We believe fluency is best achieved through language immersion. Up to half of the education at Internationella Engelska Skolan is delivered through the English language, by native English-speaking teachers.

### **High academic expectations and aspirations**

We are convinced that every child can achieve success irrespective of their background. This means we challenge every student to reach their full potential. We are dedicated to supporting students of every background to become responsible citizens and acquire the self-confidence and ambition to do the most with their talents.

### **A safe and calm school environment**

We have clear structures and expectations as this helps students feel secure. This in turn is essential to a good learning environment and signals respect for the value of education. By showing respect for each other and ourselves we lay the foundations for safe and stimulating schooling, while we care for our students in our efforts to prepare them for success as adults.

# 32 000

students

# 51%

girls

# 47%

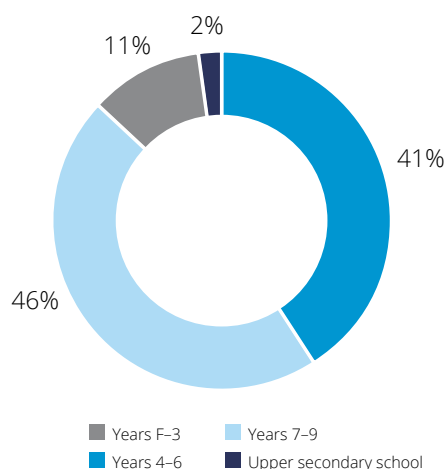
have a foreign background

# 74%

of the students have at least one parent with a post-secondary level education

### FOCUS ON COMPULSORY SCHOOL

In Sweden, IES conducts school operations from the first year of school (grade F) to the final year of upper secondary school.

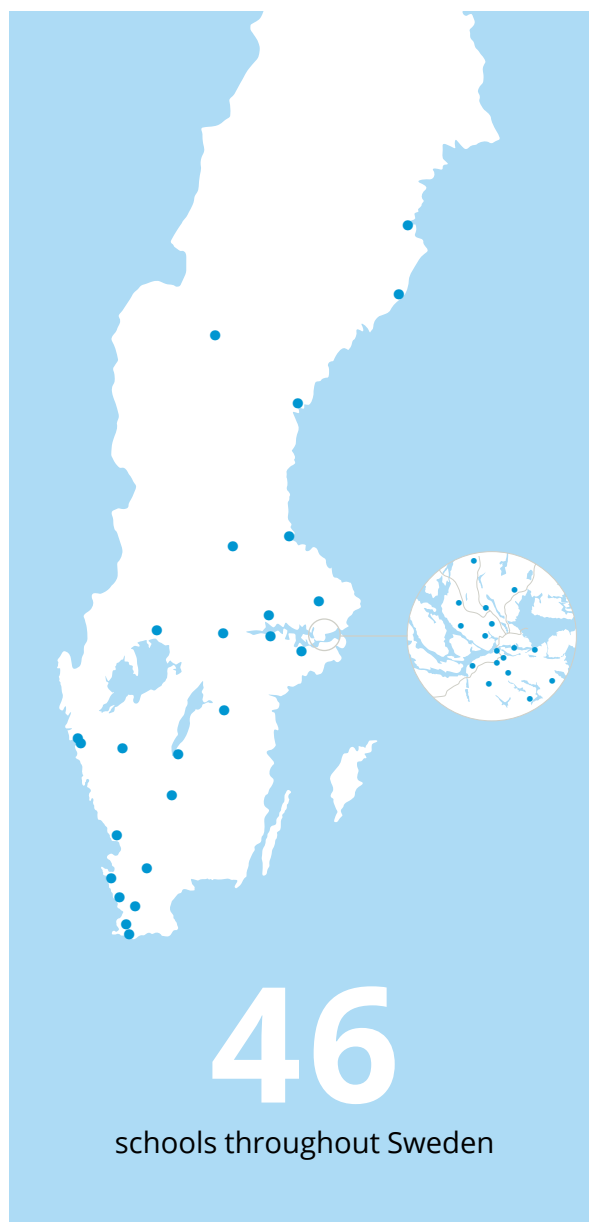


# 50%

Up to half of the teaching is conducted in English and around half of the teachers are native English speakers.

# 3,600

IES has approx. 3,600 employees, of which 2,300 are teachers.



Numbers as per September 2023.





*Lars Jonsson, CEO:*

## **“THE IES ETHOS IS JUST AS RELEVANT TODAY AS IT WAS 30 YEARS AGO – AND WILL REMAIN SO IN THE FUTURE”**

We have seen major changes since we started three decades ago. These include the number of schools, geographic locations and changes in external trends. But one thing has not changed – and that is our ethos and values. We are just as convinced today, as we were back then, that our students’ success is grounded in excellent skills in English, in a peaceful classroom environment that allows them to learn, and in the high academic expectations we have of every student. It is our ethos that has led to our success in Swedish schooling – and it will remain a key feature of our operations going forward.

IES’ goal is to give each individual student the chance to reach their full academic potential – while also helping them to become socially gifted individuals who can deal with adversity and disappointments in life. This has defined our organisation ever since Barbara Bergström opened the first Engelska Skolan in Roslagstull in Stockholm, thirty years ago.

### **TOLERANT IN PRACTICE**

One difference compared to then is that the world is becoming more and more polarised. Given this, our international profile is even more important as we create a meeting place for students who have completely different backgrounds, in terms of socio-economic circumstances and geographic origins. Our teachers also come from many different countries, which makes them good role models and opens up the world to our students. It is one thing to try to learn to be tolerant – we are tolerant in practice. This is something I’m



proud of. If we can transform our differences into strengths, then we have come a long way.

Societal changes force us to ask ourselves every day how we should develop our organisation to achieve our goals. Circumstances also differ depending on the composition of the students in each separate school. Academic success requires a safe and calm school environment. It’s a challenge, though, since our children and teenagers are in the midst of a somewhat perfect storm.

On the one hand we have just experienced a pandemic with the reduced social interactions that has entailed. On the other, there is rising mental illness amongst our children and young adults, not least caused by all the social media that demands them to be online constantly and is leading to many of them having sleeping problems. Furthermore, new research shows that children move around less after the age of eleven. This further underlines why schools need to be a safe-haven. ▶





During a school week, our students spend more time at school than at home, especially if they attend our fritids (before and after school care which follows a pedagogic curriculum). For students with an insecure home, school also becomes the place where most of their needs should be met. Neuroscience has shown that if a person is insecure, their working memory does not function properly so it becomes impossible to learn anything.

#### **THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF LEADERSHIP**

This is one of the major reasons that we place so much emphasis on having secure adults constantly visible and present in our schools. The school leaders should be role models – both for the students and the staff. This requires visible leadership; that the principal stands outside the school and greets the students, attends lessons, and sits and asks the students questions during lunch time. When the world is turbulent this becomes even more important.

#### **INFLUENCING PERCEPTION OF QUALITY AND KNOWLEDGE**

When IES started out, its activities were politically incorrect in many ways. But over the years, much of what was introduced at the time has become possible, even self-evident, in Swedish education, such as a ban on mobile phones, the matter of grades and measurement of knowledge. Today, IES has 28 schools that give grades in year four – which is now also done at an additional 20 or so schools in Sweden.

IES is also an advocate of “value added”, in other words measuring the school's contribution to the students' development. A number of municipalities and other independent schools have adopted this concept.

Nevertheless, it is safe and calm classrooms that many people associate with IES – which many other schools have imitated. It does not mean that there has to be silence in the classroom or corridors. Playing with friends is also an important component of the school day. But we do not compromise on our belief

that a calm working environment is necessary for learning, and that each student should be able to feel safe in every part of the school, at all times of the school day. Of course, there is an aspect of upbringing to this, but it is mostly so that we can dedicate ourselves to our mission of knowledge – so that teachers can teach and students learn.

#### **FOCUS ON EXPANSION IN THE YOUNGER AGE GROUPS**

IES schools have traditionally targeted years four to nine. For the past couple of years we have been expanding into primary school ages, and we are accepting students from preschool

class in more and more schools. There are several reasons for this, but it primarily come down to quality and knowledge. Students who complete their

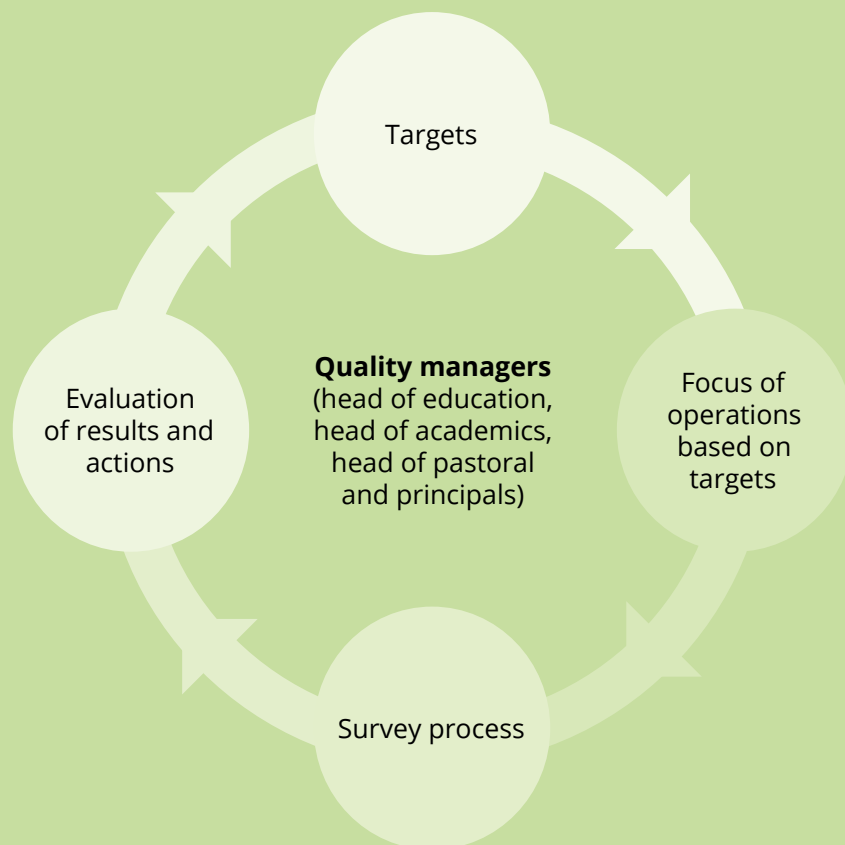
entire schooling with us experience something unique; as early as six years of age they are exposed to our international culture and gain a respect for knowledge, school, others and themselves. They also gradually become bilingual from an age when they do not even reflect that a second language can be difficult to learn. Many parents have been requesting pre-school class and primary school years for a long time, and we are happy to be increasingly able to provide this.

At times during IES' history, there has been a great deal of media noise about our organisation. What spurs us on is knowing how important our schools have been and continue to be for many students – both for their careers and their social success. I am often struck by the fantastic colleagues we have that make this happen – committed teachers and other school staff who see and acknowledge every student every day, and who are good role models for hard work paying off.

As we now look forward to the next chapter of IES' history, there is one thing we know will remain constant: that it is essential for us to stand firm with our ethos to continue to succeed in what we do. //

*“We do not compromise on our belief that a calm working environment is necessary for learning.”*





*IES quality process:*

## STRUCTURED PROCESSES TO ENSURE AND IMPROVE QUALITY

Internationella Engelska Skolan’s overall goal is to give every student the possibility to achieve high academic expectations and aspirations and to navigate through an international environment, whatever their background. Our academic expectations are high for every student, in every school that IES runs. The journey there has to be tailored to the composition of students and local circumstances, though. To succeed in this, IES must maintain a consistently high level of quality across all our operations, based on the same underlying principles.

Internationella Engelska Skolan is a bilingual Swedish school with an international profile, where each student is given the opportunity to achieve high academic expectations and aspirations and where teaching takes place in a safe and calm environment. The organisation was founded in 1993 with one school in central Stockholm – which means that IES is celebrating its 30-year anniversary in the 2023/2024 academic year.

Our organisation has always believed in the same basic idea, that there must be a high level of quality in our education and that teachers must have high academic

expectations for their students, regardless of their starting point. One important factor here is creating a supportive, safe and dynamic environment that helps to generate a positive view of school and the learning experience. In other words, it’s about “hard” and “soft” quality. IES follows a systematic approach to ensure quality and identify potential areas for improvement, including regular evaluation, action and follow-up. These areas are based on several different indicators including surveys, qualification for upper secondary school, national tests and admissions to higher education. ▶

### IES QUALITY IMPROVEMENT WORK IS BASED ON FOUR INDICATORS:

Student survey

Parent survey

Teacher survey

National tests

### STRUCTURED FOLLOW-UP

Throughout the entire organisation there is a strong desire to keep improving so as to fulfil our promise to parents and students. While it can be difficult to measure and compare the quality of different schools, one set of measurements that can be used are the national test results, as these tests are conducted by all schools in Sweden. This is why IES has focused on following up the results of these tests for many years. When measured over time, the results of IES' students are approximately 15 per cent higher than the national average in the subjects of mathematics, Swedish and English. One of the primary goals for IES is for all students to qualify for further studies. In the 2022/2023 academic year, 94 per cent of IES students qualified for upper secondary school, compared with 85 per cent for Sweden as a whole.

### STRONG AND CLEAR LEADERSHIP

Strong local school leadership is an important parameter for a safe and orderly school environment. This is in turn essential to effective learning – in other words to achieving quality. IES is driven by its core values and recruits principals who live and lead according to these. The role of the principals is to ensure that IES' core values are converted into actions and behaviours, every day.

This work is based on our *Basic Defining Policy*, which describes IES' targets, expectations and ethical guidelines.

The principal is responsible for ensuring that their school's operations adhere to the policy. Each school also draws up school rules, in accordance with the *Swedish Education Act*. These rules are updated every year in consultation with the student council, and signed by all students and parents. At the same time, teachers are expected to act as role models for how these should be put into practice.

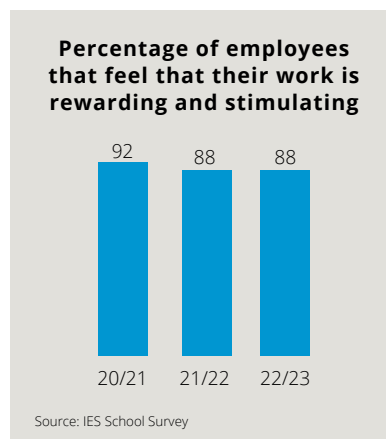
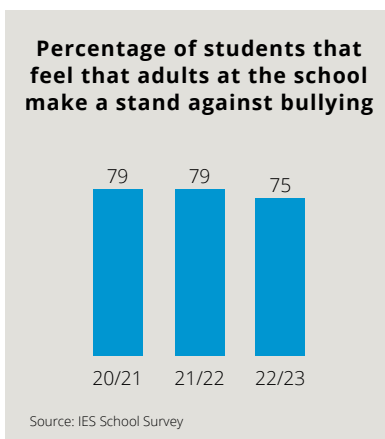
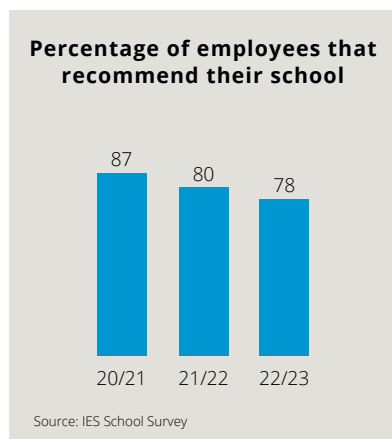
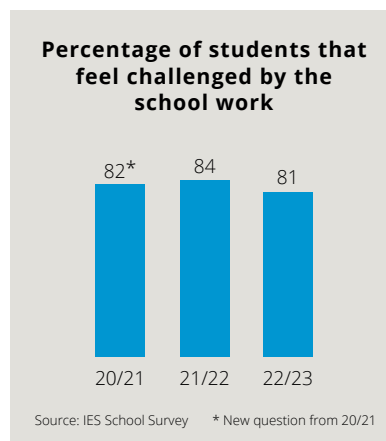
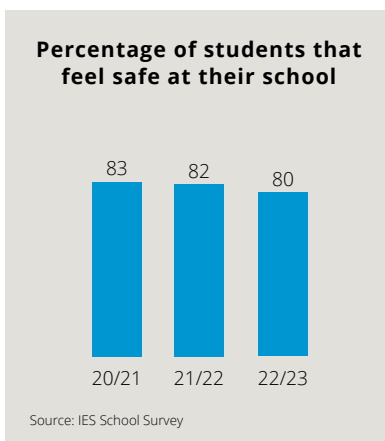
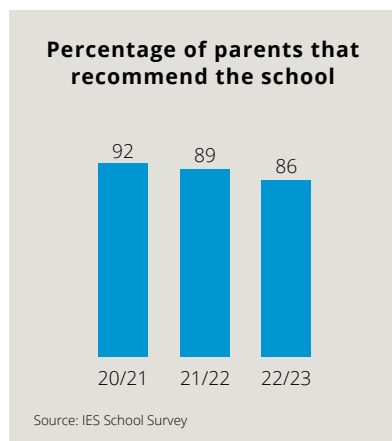
### STRUCTURED AND CONTINUOUS QUALITY PROCESS

Our quality improvement work follows a carefully-structured, annual process. Every school sets goals and plans its operations for the upcoming academic year. In other words, while goals are set locally, they are agreed against the overarching goals for IES as an organisation. These include results and environmental factors, i.e. the dimensions of quality defined by IES.

In April every year, students, parents and employees are surveyed to assess how well the organisation lives up to these goals. The questions are formulated per target group under the categories of academic environment, social environment (i.e. safety, support and a calm study environment) and the school environment. Parents and employees are also asked about how well the school's leadership works.

The answers are evaluated during the summer by the school's quality managers, i.e. IES' head of education, ▶

## STATISTICS FROM OUR ANNUAL ANONYMOUS SURVEY OF TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS







YOU FOR HELPING US!

Läsning

13.30-14.15

- Line up
- Teamwork
- Första lektionen
- Andra lektionen
- ... och så vidare
- ... och så vidare

VA

head of academics, head of pastoral, and the principal of each school. Any deviations versus the goals are identified, and an action plan is developed jointly with the relevant school at the beginning of the academic year. Data is compiled in a report that every school works with during the entire academic year.

Recent years have testified to the significance of the social component of our operations. During the pandemic, when physical meetings with parents decreased and activities for students outside of teaching hours were suspended, the students' and the parents' perception of quality and their engagement with the school decreased. In other words, it was a clear indication of how important it is for us to stay in close contact with parents and to link academic work with student care, the foundation of our organisation since the beginning.

We are still noticing the effects of the pandemic period, for instance it is difficult to get parents to return to physical meetings at the schools. We are therefore looking into various activities to create engagement and to invite parents and others into our schools.

#### **GREAT INTEGRITY IN GRADING**

Integrity in grading is a major priority for IES' systematic quality work. In 2021, we introduced a new type of statistics

database, which the individual IES schools and IES centrally use to evaluate, compare and analyse grading. Any deviations in grades compared to the results in the national tests, as well as any deviations compared to the IES average and municipal and national averages, are examined to ensure that teachers grade correctly. IES' quality improvement system can monitor several different areas, including per student, school, year and subject, and it allows comparisons over time.

*"The way IES works with integrity in grading continues to be successful"*

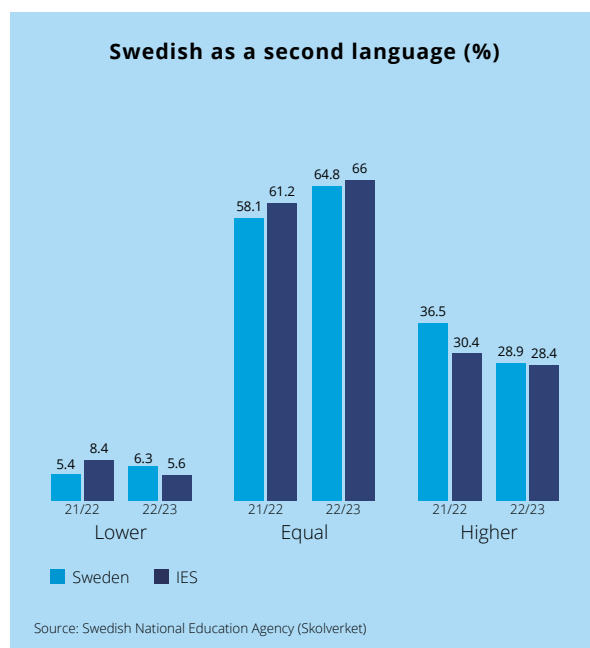
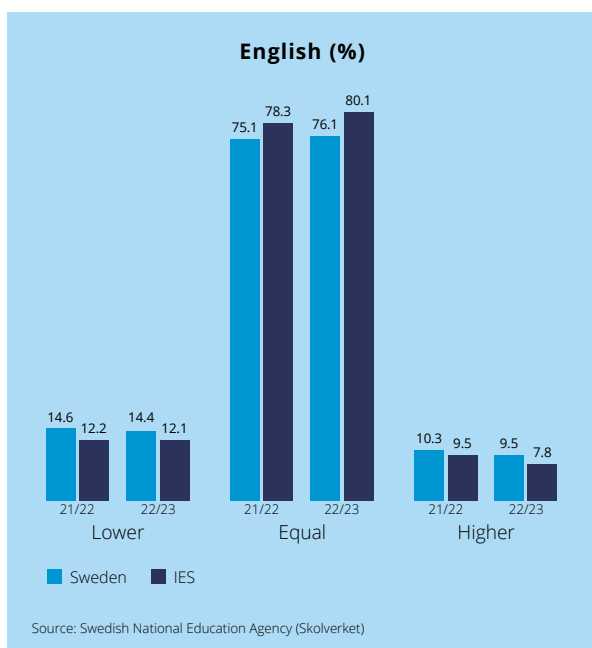
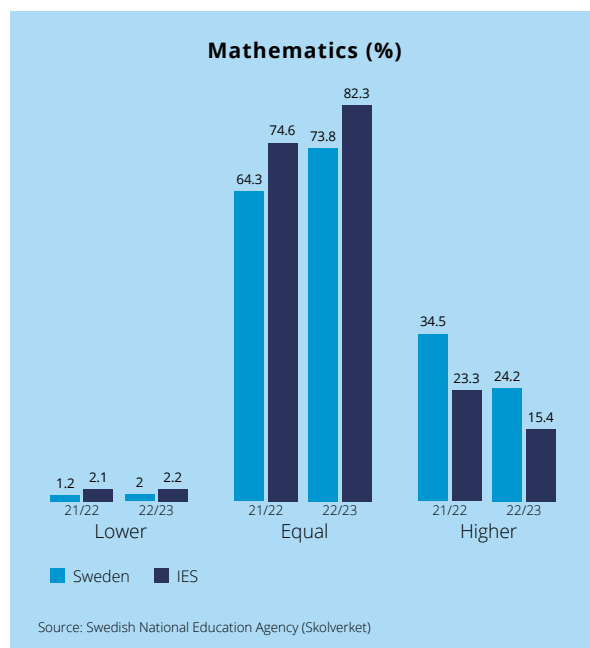
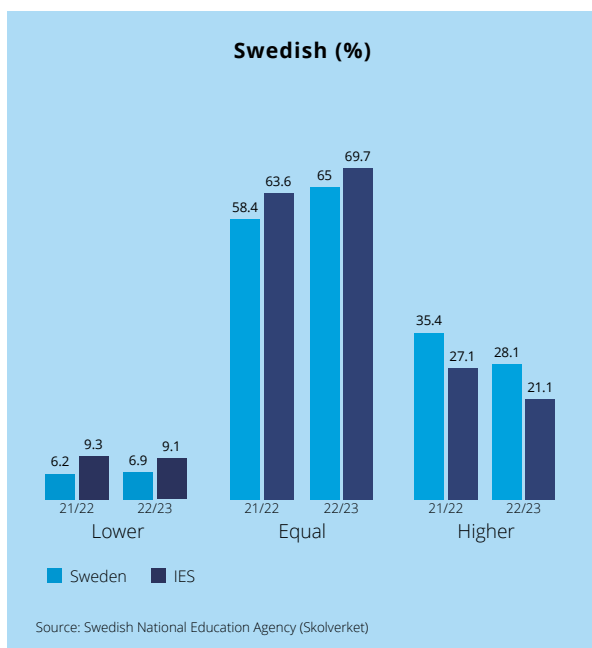
Every teacher has been granted the authority to set grades and IES supports them in this by providing the right conditions for teachers to make fair assessments.

To help teachers and ensure grades are set fairly, we have set up an internal moderation process between subject teachers in our schools, in which the subject teachers compare student work before setting grades, so as to support conditions that facilitate fair grading. In addition, specific heads of department are tasked with coordinating the quality of teaching and grading between the schools. Further training in this area is also held for the schools' academic managers.

IES teachers that have a foreign teaching degree receive specific support for grading from a teacher with a Swedish teaching degree in that subject. The heads of departments and academic managers in each school are responsible ▶



**IES STUDENTS' FINAL GRADES ARE MORE CONSISTENT WITH THEIR RESULTS ON THE NATIONAL TESTS THAN IN THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE**



for ensuring that new teachers from other countries quickly gain an understanding of the Swedish system of grading and the Swedish national curriculum.

In several places around the country, IES has also started to collaborate with municipal schools to compare grading and learn from each other. Results in the national tests also serve as a guideline for grading and are specifically taken into account when teachers give grades.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen), which conducts regular audits of the grading work of

school operators, has also confirmed that IES' grading works well. IES was one of the school operators audited as part of the report *How school operators promote fair and equal grading in compulsory schools (Huvudmans arbete för att främja rättvisande och likvärdiga betyg i grundskolan)* published in December 2021. In that report, the Schools Inspectorate's assessor stated that IES as a school operator "implements measures of high quality to create the conditions for fair and equal grading".

The updated national curriculum that was introduced in autumn 2022 – LGR22 – contains fewer value-related ▶



*"I'm actually good in all subjects, even if maths isn't my favourite. We speak French at home, so I'm really good at that. It also depends on the teacher, which subject is most interesting. Generally the teachers here are good. I also like the school food. It's super."*

**EMMANUEL**, CLASS 9C, IES JÖNKÖPING



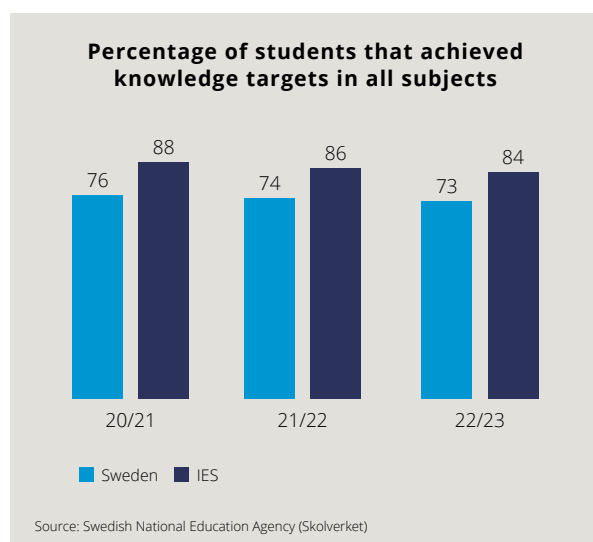
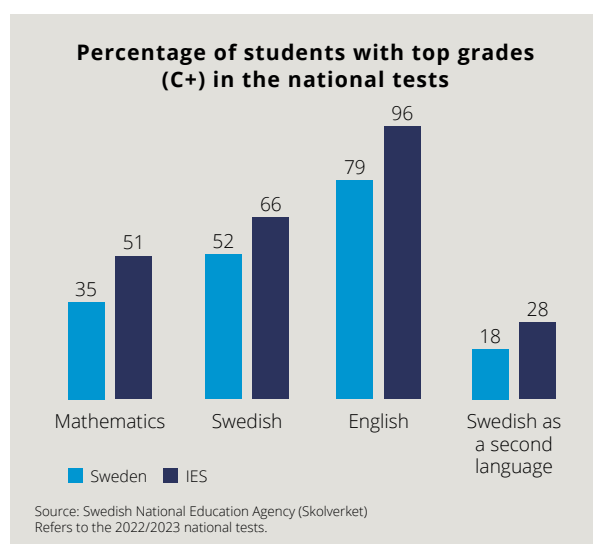


words in the grading criteria. It is believed that this should make grading easier in the future, and also allow teachers to focus more on student learning and on teaching situations.

### NATIONAL TESTS

IES closely monitors each student's national test results. This is an important part of our quality improvement work, and ensures that students develop the knowledge and skills they need for the future.

The year nine national tests for the 2022/2023 academic year once again showed a higher level of consistency between students' results in these tests and their final grades in Swedish, Swedish as second language, mathematics and English for IES students than for the entire country. Furthermore, the level of consistency was higher when compared to the previous year. We see this as proof that the continuous efforts made by our teachers, principals and academic managers to ensure accurate and fair grading are having an impact.



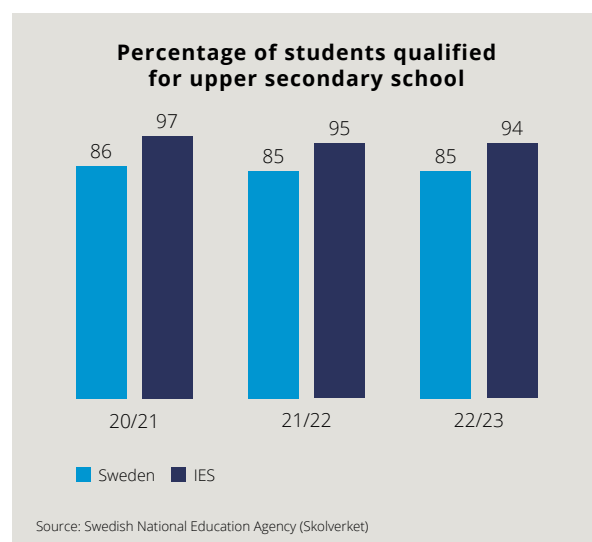
The national tests are an important instrument for assessing the students' knowledge and for ensuring accurate and fair grading. For that reason, IES has advocated for central grading of the national tests for many years, and we are now delighted that the Government intends to accelerate this transition. Until it is introduced, we will continue to implement systematic cooperation between our IES schools on moderation of the national tests.

In subjects for which there is no national test, such as technology, crafts, art, music and home economics, each school submits its preliminary grades one month prior to grading. The purpose of this is to see the distribution of the grades and identify any deviations. If deviations are noticed, the relevant school is asked to further analyse the situation.

### VALUE ADDED

An objective measure of school quality is needed to address low levels of knowledge and to identify which kinds of teaching work well. We believe that the value-added metric is good place to start. The value-added metric aims to measure the change in students' performance that can be attributed to the school. The score is calculated by comparing the results of the national tests in year six and year nine in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and Swedish. To ensure that the value-added score captures the quality of the school, the calculations also take background variables into account, including the students' and their parents' country of birth and the parents' level of income and education. Value added scores are based on student-level data from Statistics Sweden (SCB) for all students registered to take the national tests.

If the difference is positive and is larger than in other schools, it indicates that the school has contributed positively to the student's progress during their schooling. In countries such as Norway, England and the US the value



added is measured systematically as part of the school system.\* In 2020, independent researchers Gabriel Heller-Sahlgren and Henrik Jordal carried out an analysis of value added, based on the result of the 2019 national tests.\*\* The report indicated higher value-added scores for IES than for the country's other independent schools and municipal schools in English and mathematics, while the difference in Swedish was less clear. Further to comments from other researchers, the researchers have chosen to modify their calculation model for the value-added score from the 19/20 academic year report onwards. This has been a change to all the value-added calculations that they produce around education in Sweden. The new model gives a more holistic view that takes into account how the core subjects interrelate and affect one another, and the results the students achieve.

The value-added metric obviously needs to be supplemented with other measurements of the school's operations, such as enjoyment and the school's role in upbringing, elements that develop the students' social skills, confidence and faith in the future, which are also important aspects of the task of schooling. Just as it does today, systematic quality work also needs to encompass regular surveys of students, parents and school staff.

### ENHANCING QUALITY THROUGH SCHOOL VISITS

We carry out regular quality visits to all our schools. During these visits, the head of education, head of academics, and head of pastoral interview teachers, principals and academic managers. They also attend lessons, after which they share their observations with the principal. These observations are followed up continuously as part of our systematic quality work.

### COMPLAINTS

IES is keen to develop close and trustworthy collaboration with parents, for the good of the children and their education. If students or their guardians have a complaint, they

are encouraged to contact the student's mentor who will document the complaint and start an investigation if needed. The mentor may also forward the complaint to the head of year, the head of department, academic manager or another member of staff. If the complaint concerns an employee, it is sent immediately to the principal or assistant principal.

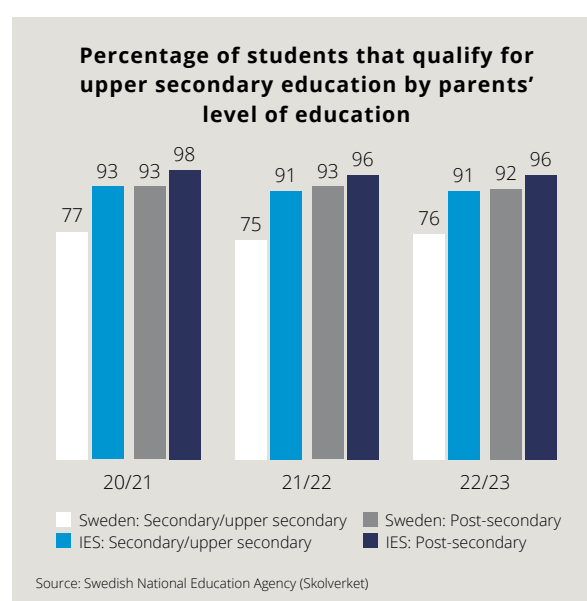
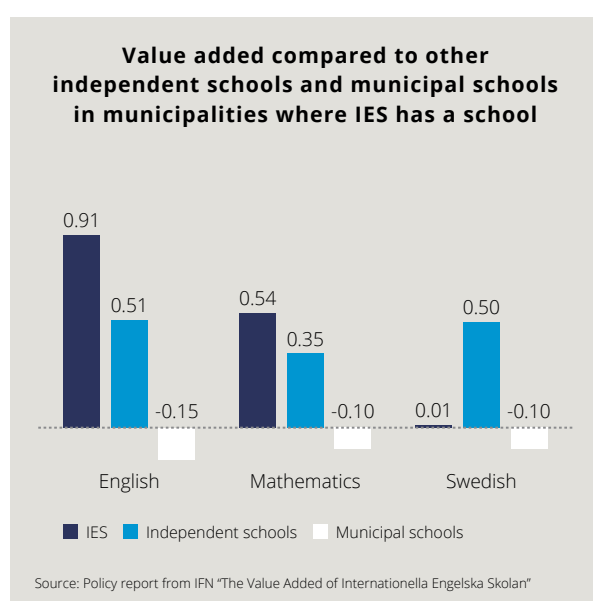
If no acceptable solution can be reached within the school, the complaint can be forwarded to the organisation that operates the school, in other words *Internationella Engelska Skolan i Sverige AB*.

### FULFILLING STUDENTS' DIFFERENT NEEDS

IES helps all students reach their full potential, which is a crucial factor for them to achieve good results. In practice it means the school must help students who need support, while also ensuring that high-performing students are sufficiently stimulated and challenged, and we never give up on any student. As a role model, the school has to show as much 'grit' – determination and a burning desire to see things through – as is expected of the students.

Students perform diagnostic tests in Swedish and mathematics in years four and six to identify those who need extra support or those who need more of a challenge. Since IES started in 1993 it has offered homework support on top of regular lessons so that students can study a subject in more detail, receive more challenging work, or get help. Those schools that have a large proportion of students with a weaker socio-economic background often stay open longer in the afternoons to offer students a calm place to do their homework. They also serve breakfast to ensure that the students get a good start to the day.

By motivating every single student to do their best and by having high expectations of all students, IES achieves better results for students from all types of backgrounds. As an example, 91 per cent of IES students whose parents have no post-secondary education qualified to study at upper ▶



\* Source: "Föräldringens värde – att mäta skolans och lärarens effektivitet", Gabriel Heller-Sahlgren \*\* Source: Policy report from IFN – "The Value Added of Internationella Engelska Skolan"



secondary school (see graphs on page 18). This compares with the national average of 76 per cent (figures refer to the 2022/2023 academic year).

#### **PRIORITISING SAFETY**

Providing safety is also important to achieving good academic results. All schools adhere to the *Plan Against Abusive Treatment*. This describes how the school actively and purposefully works to prevent all forms of abusive treatment. Physical safety around the school is another priority, including the traffic situation and any potential threats from external visitors. IES applies a “closed-campus” policy which means all students remain within the school during school hours and all visitors must register at a manned reception.

IES’ activities to improve student health, safety and the physical working environment are governed by the document *Checklist for Health and Safety*, and the school’s prin-

cipals are responsible for implementing and following up this work. The results of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate’s (Skolinspektionen) evaluations also provide input to these efforts. The schools’ academic managers help teachers to identify students who need extra resources or otherwise need to be given more attention, while the student health coordinator ensures that other educational resources are made available.

IES adheres to the *Swedish Education Act*, including chapter six, and complies with the obligation each school has to notify, investigate and act around abusive treatment. In addition, the principals of each school develop a more detailed plan for how bullying must be prevented and dealt with. These procedures are documented in each school’s *Plan Against Abusive Treatment*, and are then followed up via the annual survey in which students are asked whether they feel safe in the school. //

#### **International tests to provide an extra challenge**

IES students can choose to take extra exams, known as Cambridge IGCSEs (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) from Cambridge Assessment International Education. These tests are internationally recognised and based on teaching materials from Cambridge International with a significantly higher level than those set in the Swedish curriculum.



**Cambridge Associate**

*Internationella Engelska Skolan is a registered member of Cambridge Assessment International Education.*

## “I HAVE PROGRESSED FROM PROBLEM-SOLVER TO LEADER”

SIMON VARLEY, PRINCIPAL, IES JÖNKÖPING

**From a job as a young teacher at IES in Gävle to a position at the head office, and later as the principal of IES Jönköping. “One of the main things I’ve learnt from my 20 years at IES is the importance of being a clear leader – and to never divert from our core values,” says Simon Varley.**

Before Mr Varley was due to have his first meeting with Barbara Bergström in 2003, he went out and bought a shirt and tie.

“I had understood that certain rules applied – and I was so eager to get the job as a teacher at IES,” he says and laughs.

His tactics may have contributed to his getting a job as a science teacher at IES Gävle later that year, where he quickly advanced to become the head of year. After two years he was enticed over to the head office to coordinate the academic work of the group.

“It was a period of expansion with many new schools where we worked intensively to establish procedures. It was stimulating and fun. But after four years in the office I longed to go back to the students, teaching and the school environment. So when IES Jönköping was going to open I applied for the job as the principal there,” he explains.

### DECLINING RESULTS

In 2009 IES Jönköping started with plans to receive 360 students – a goal that nobody believed in. But the school filled up quickly and is the largest school in the municipality today, with 900 students.

But the road to the school’s current popularity has been far from smooth, according to Mr Varley.

“I was new in the job and way too attentive to others’ views. This meant that in the beginning I somewhat lost focus on the core of what we do and didn’t understand the importance of recruiting the right staff, who really believe in IES’ values. As an example, some parents thought that their children found the English too difficult and therefore wanted more Swedish teachers. I listened and increased the proportion of Swedish teachers, without checking that

they had the necessary commitment to IES. Our results in the quality surveys started to slide downwards and, in the end, I realised that we needed to do something,” he recounts.

### “REVERT TO YOUR ETHOS”

Mr Varley arranged a parents’ meeting to discuss solutions.



“We had prepared some suggestions for how to improve the atmosphere in the school. One of them was to open a bakery. But the parents said, “no no – we want you to revert to your ethos”.

“It was a real eye-opener for me, and I realised that the most important element of a school is its people: without good teachers and support staff that stand by IES’ values you can’t build a good school.

“Those staff members who did not believe in the IES concept chose to leave the school themselves and we were able to replace them with people who were fully behind the values.

“I spend countless hours every year on interviewing teachers from all over the world, in the search for the best possible team. I naturally look for teachers who are qualified and knowledgeable in their subjects, but more importantly I consider the actual people – their character, motivation and desire to be part of our team.

“I’m proud that the school is one of the most popular in the municipality today. And I’ve developed personally from being a problem-solver to becoming a true leader within the organisation,” says Mr Varley.

### BARBARA BERGSTRÖM’S TEN POINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP:

- Be present
- Be visible
- Be steady
- Acknowledge people around you
- Point out the importance of details
- Emphasise the importance of everybody pulling in the same direction
- Be fair
- Radiate energy
- Deal with difficult situations immediately
- Take responsibility

### IES JÖNKÖPING

**870**  
students

**8 of 10**  
students recommended  
the school

**66%**  
students with origins  
outside Sweden

**92%**  
students qualified for  
upper secondary school

**94%**  
of parents had confidence  
in the school leadership

Numbers as per September 2023.





*“One thing that’s different about this school compared with some of my friends’ schools, is that there is more structure and order. I think this is good. It’s much easier to learn then.*

*And there’s also the English, and the multi-cultural atmosphere with lots of students and teachers from other cultures. It’s makes me curious about the world”.*

**AXEL, CLASS 8A, IES JÖNKÖPING**

*“I have grown since I started working here ten years ago – both professionally and as a person. I’ve been pushed and encouraged. To begin with I wasn’t convinced that I wanted to be a teacher, but now I think it’s fantastic. I had a really good mentor when I started, which helped me get into the role quickly.*

*The school has grown quite a lot since I started and it’s really great to have all these new colleagues from different countries. It’s enriching.*

*The most fun thing about the job is seeing the children’s development – from learning their first letter to being able to write an entire story. The most challenging thing is being enough for every student – I currently have 23 children between 5 and 6 years old in my class”.*

**JOHANNA AHLSTRAND**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER, IES JÖNKÖPING



## “YOUR BACKGROUND DOES NOT DEFINE WHO YOU ARE”

DAMIAN BRUNKER, PRINCIPAL, IES ESKILSTUNA

**How do you generate a sense of faith in the future in a district that is on the police’s list of socially vulnerable areas, where the gangs rule? In Fröslunda in the town of Eskilstuna, it took close collaboration between a determined, tweed-jacketed, British IES principal and a visionary Social-Democrat politician. Some may consider this a somewhat unexpected combination, but it resulted in a successful school with great expectations of its students – a school that has helped make the entire area safer.**

When the school organised a parents’ meeting, four people showed up. When the school management invited people to a Middle-Eastern party, 200 parents came.

“The parents’ participation in – and attitudes towards – the school are enormously important. When people have an innate distrust of all types of authority, unconventional methods may be required,” comments Damian Bunker, the principal of IES Eskilstuna.

At IES Eskilstuna, 77 per cent of the 1,200 or so students come from homes where Swedish is not the first language. At least eleven languages are spoken by the students and Somali and Arabic are two of the most widely spoken. The school is located in Fröslunda, one of the areas of Sweden that the police have classified as a socially vulnerable area. The district grew during the 1950s in response to the housing shortage in Eskilstuna at the time, as well as the new ideal of modern homes for industrial workers. During recent years, the area’s socio-economic challenges have increased resulting in high unemployment, insuffi-

cient integration of the many foreign-born citizens, and a large proportion of people on social welfare. The school was in crisis, the gangs were taking over, and violence was part of everyday life.

### JOINING FORCES TO LIFT FRÖSLUNDA

Over the past few years, under the leadership of the Mayor Jimmy Jansson (S) the municipality has joined forces with others to bring about a real lift to the area of Fröslunda.

The goal is to reverse the negative spiral and turn Fröslunda into a place where a diversity of people enjoy being, feel safe, and want to live and meet each other. A new initiative, SSPF, has been initiated by the municipality together with other local stakeholders. The idea is that school staff, social services, the police and fritids staff (providing before and after school care which follows a pedagogic curriculum) collaborate better to detect youngsters who are in the risk zone for criminality.



The school is at the centre of the initiative, where IES in 2020 made a significant investment and built out the school under the leadership of Damian Brunker.

“Fröslunda is exactly where we should be in Eskilstuna. It’s here we can make the greatest difference. We can be part of the solution when it comes to lifting young people up and giving them hope and the opportunity for a bright future,” he says.

Damian Brunker has had plenty of experience of tough school environments after teaching in problem schools in some of England’s old coal-mining towns. He grew up outside Manchester with a father who was also a head teacher and who inspired his choice to become a teacher who ▶



*“Can we speak English? I prefer that. I come from Eritrea and we speak a lot of English at home. My ambition is to be a lawyer and I want to study in London. It’s good that so much of the teaching in this school is done in English – and that we have good teachers who give us a lot of support. My goal is to start my own law firm and employ a few other lawyers. Once I’ve earned enough money, I’m going to switch to being an author and write a book.”*

ELINOR, CLASS 8F, IES ESKILSTUNA

aspired to improve society. Over time, love brought Damian Brunker to Eskilstuna where he got a job as a teacher at the IES secondary school there. That job led to an assignment at the head office as the head of academics for IES.

“But I missed working at the sharp end, close to students and teachers. That’s why I wanted the job of principal when IES and the municipality decided to invest in the school in Fröslunda,” says Mr Brunker.

#### REQUIRED COMMITMENT – AND COURAGE

The built out and renovated school opened in the autumn semester of 2022. The organisation is divided into primary, middle and lower secondary units and the objective has been to create a safe environment for all students whilst also giving them access to pristine new premises adapted to each year. The premises include a new sports hall and playground too.

A great deal of commitment and courage has been required from all staff, not least the principal, to make the intended safe environment a reality.

“In the beginning we had to deal with smashed windows every Monday when we arrived at the school and there were a number of incidents in the playground – including a shooting,” he explains.

#### SAFE ENVIRONMENT AND HIGH QUALITY IN TEACHING

With the help of a fantastic group of employees the trend has been bucked. The rumour has spread in the area that

the school is a good, safe place and a positive force for the youngsters, and it’s been a long time since any of the school’s windows were smashed.

“One example that illuminates the view of the school is that even students with substantial challenges who don’t want to participate in lessons come to school as they feel safe here,” says Mr Brunker.

“The tough environment has helped to create strong bonds between the staff and also with the students. When I recruit a new employee, I do all I can to discourage them. If they are still interested in the job then I know that they are the right person,” he continues.

In spite of the tough reputation of the area, the school has attracted students from other parts of Eskilstuna and from other neighbouring municipalities such as Arboga and Katrineholm.

“This is sound proof of the quality of the teaching we provide here. The school hasn’t only become a safe place, we also have talented teachers, which is evident in the excellent results the students achieve.

“One of my most important messages to all students who attend the school, regardless of where they come from, is that they should be proud of who they are, and that their background does not define them as a person,” says Mr Brunker.

# 96%

students qualified for upper secondary school

## IES ESKILSTUNA

# 1179

students

# 7 of 10

students recommended the school

# 77%

students with origins outside Sweden

# 96%

students qualified for upper secondary school

# 76%

students achieved the knowledge targets in all subjects

Numbers as per September 2023.

*“The IES school here is like a safe bubble, I really enjoy it and like being at school. One of my hobbies is reading books and I have started to lead a book club at the school. We get a lot of encouragement to develop our interests. My dream is to be a human rights lawyer or maybe a journalist. Meeting all the teachers from different countries makes me curious about travelling and maybe working in other countries.”*

**ATOUSA, CLASS 4D, IES ESKILSTUNA**







*"I wanted to attend this school because it is more peaceful than my old school - and also to learn English. It's good that there are a few more rules, which also makes it easier to learn more."*

*"My favourite subjects are science and maths, but I am also interested in social studies. The teachers here are good. They make their subjects interesting. My goal in life is to become a police officer - I want to help people in need."*

**KAJSA, CLASS 9A, IES ÖSTERSUND**

*"I heard a rumour that IES was going to open a school in Östersund and I felt that that was where I wanted to work as a teacher. So I mail-bombed Mika Reunanen, the principal, to ask for a meeting. I'm now happy that I've been here since the beginning and been able to contribute some ideas. It has been a very open climate where everybody's opinions have been welcomed. It is really fun to collaborate with so many ambitious colleagues and be part of building a culture."*

*"The main challenge for me as a middle-school teacher is that certain students have such negative experiences from before, which sometimes means they have a hard time handling relationships. It's tremendously satisfying to see these students making new friends - and hear them say that they enjoy school."*

**ANDREA LILJA**  
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (LANGUAGES) AND  
ENGLISH TEACHER, YEARS 4 AND 6, IES ÖSTERSUND





## “WHEN GRIT ISN’T ENOUGH I SWITCH TO SISU”

MIKA REUNANEN, PRINCIPAL, IES ÖSTERSUND

**“Clear leadership is phenomenally important. With my Finnish background, I can add a dose of “sisu” here – in other words, courage and perseverance,” says Mika Reunanen, principal of IES Östersund. “My ambition is for everybody to know that it is necessary to make an effort, to deal with adversity and dare to work hard to achieve your goals,” he explains.**

A sign hangs in the entrance to IES Östersund stating the school’s values and vision. The text ends with “together, as a team, we face adversity with courage and determination... we stand up for each other as a team, and as individuals we always give our all to achieve our absolute best. We are building a culture inspired by sisu, the art of being brave”.

This message is a good description of how Mika Reunanen runs his school, one of the most recent IES establishments, and which attracted 500 students over a short period of time through its clear focus on safety and a calm learning environment.

“I want to inspire everybody whose work place is the school – students, teachers and other staff members – to persevere and focus on their goals. This is not my school, it’s our school and it is up to all of us to make it as good as possible,” he says.

“Clear leadership is important. But it is equally important to create a collaborative and attentive culture. We listen to opinions from students and teachers, but we do not touch the fundamental values that our organisation rests upon. This creates a sense of security.”

### EMPLOYEES MADE OF “THE RIGHT STUFF”

With sixteen years in the Swedish Armed Forces, a few years as a trainer of the national downhill skiing team, a year at the equine-focused education centre Wången and six years as the principal of a different independent school on his CV, it was an experienced leader who took command of Östersund’s newest independent school. The reason he accepted the assignment was IES’ fundamental values, he says.



“IES’ clear values summarise everything I believe in and have aimed for in my previous positions. It has been enormously stimulating to build a new school from scratch with a team of colleagues and a culture based on these values.

“I have personally recruited all 66 members of staff we currently have at the school. I wanted to make sure that they were made of the right stuff”, he says.

### EVERYONE MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Like most IES schools, IES Östersund is characterised by a multi-cultural mix of teachers and students, from many parts of the world.

“We have high expectations of all our students, both those who are high-performing and those with bigger challenges. We also have high expectations of our teachers. But these high expectations must be matched with the school being perceived as a warm and welcoming place, where everybody is seen and heard and where it is possible to be part of decision-making. Continuous, positive feedback is important to everyone, including teachers.

“It’s about creating commitment, with everybody taking responsibility for everything that happens in the school.

“Everyone has to show the same level of grit. I encourage each and every person to try to solve their own challenges but my door is always open if anybody needs help. And when grit isn’t enough, we switch to sisu”, says Mr Reunanen.

This has been a successful recipe, with a high level of applicants per place from parents and students. Teachers from Sweden and other countries have been attracted to the school, which apart from its strong culture tempts people thanks to the region’s rich outdoor activities.

One objection that Mr Reunanen has often heard is that the school drains other schools of staff.

“It’s actually the opposite – we are a contributing factor to more people moving to the region, from other parts of Sweden and from abroad. Those people who are concerned about it don’t have the full picture, the school brings a lot of positive aspects with it.

### IES ÖSTERSUND

**573**

students

**6 of 10**

students recommended the school

**36%**

students with origins outside Sweden

**97%**

students qualified for upper secondary school

**67%**

students achieved the knowledge targets in all subjects

Numbers as per September 2023.



*Primary years and fritids:*

## **“WE LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING”**

“By getting to know children and their parents at an earlier stage of each child’s life, it’s easier for us to offer the support each individual needs to develop to their full potential. This is one of the key reasons that IES has decided to offer more places from as early as preschool class, in new and existing schools around the country. This gives us a chance to create a good foundation for the child’s future schooling, not least linguistically, and also imbue a desire for lifelong learning”, comments Magdalena Bull, primary years manager at IES.

IES has traditionally emphasised years four to nine. For the past couple of years all new schools have been open to students in preschool class, and more schools are opening up to students for the entire range of compulsory school years, from preschool class to year nine.

“This gives us a unique opportunity to perform even better in our goal to offer the best possible academic development for each individual, while at the same time supporting each student in leaving school as a self-assured and responsible adult.”

### **SUPPORT READING SKILLS AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**

The primary objective of the new role as primary years manager is to lead and support the advancement of academic quality as well as self-confidence, health and safety. In other words ensuring the academics and pastoral aspects within preschool class, *fritids* (before and after school care which follows a pedagogic curriculum) and years one to three.

“When we have the chance to get to know children and ▶

their parents early, we have an opportunity to lay the foundation for a positive view of schooling and learning. We also have the chance to support the child with their reading skills and with Swedish and English – which is particularly important for children with a different language background.

“Starting at IES already at the age of six gives children a unique opportunity to become part of our unique, international and inclusive culture from the beginning, where the Swedish and English languages co-exist naturally, and where tolerance for differences and ‘warm authority’ are a given,” says Ms Bull.

#### **FRITIDS CENTRE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE STUDENT’S DAY**

According to the Education Act, fritids centres should stimulate the students’ development and learning, and offer them meaningful recreational activities before, after or otherwise connected to the school day, and during holidays. Students should also be given the chance to develop their ability to deal with conflicts constructively.

“The fritids centre is a tremendously important part of the student’s day. IES strongly believes that the student should succeed socially, not only academically, and a solid foundation for this is laid at the fritids centre,” comments Ms Bull.

“A lot has happened in terms of fritids activities and teaching, compared to when we started 30 years ago, but our goal is still the same, i.e. to create an inspiring environment for our students.”

The purpose of the fritids centre is to complement the pre-school class and the school, and allow parents to combine parenthood with work or study. The fritids centre should stimulate the students’ development and learning, provide them meaningful recreational activities, and foster all-round relationships and social community.

“There are already so many good initiatives within IES when it comes to fritids centres, and my role partly involves sharing best practices, knowledge and experiences between the schools. That’s why one of my first tasks will be to set up a forum for everybody who works with younger students and fritids at IES,” says Ms Bull.

#### **NATURE IMPORTANT IN IES VÄRMDÖ’S FRITIDS ACTIVITIES**

IES Värmdö is one of the schools with a preschool class, years one to three, and a fritids centre. The playground, which includes everything from a cosy reading corner to climbing frames, board games and a dodge ball court, is evidence of the focus on giving children a chance for calm and quiet as well as lively activities – depending on their mood. Adults are always present in the playground so that it feels safe, and to deal with any conflicts.

“We place great emphasis on the children feeling safe in the playground, and therefore have three staff members working with the break-time activities full time. One important task is to prevent bullying, and also to teach the students to show respect for each other and for property,” says the assistant principal, Brayden Scarlett.

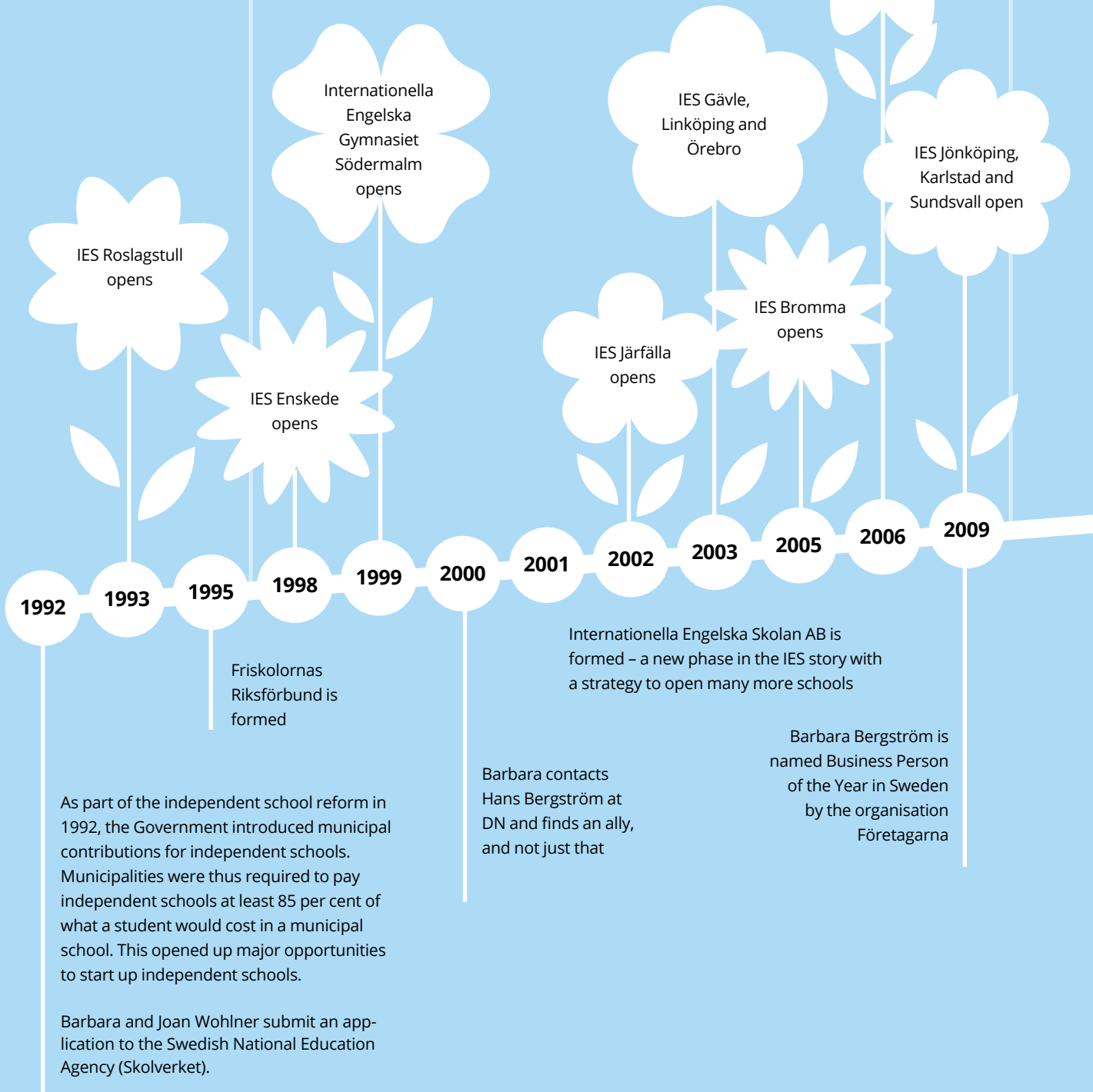
“We have an advantage in that the school is located close to natural and beautiful recreational areas, so we can come up with all sorts of fun activities linked to what the students are studying at the time. We therefore collaborate closely with the teachers,” adds Sarah Wetherell who is in charge of the fritids centre at IES Värmdö.

Around 300 children per day join in the activities offered by the fritids centre, where the school day starts with breakfast at 6.30am, and a snack during the day is popular. There is also a host of indoor activities designed to stimulate the children’s imagination and desire to play. //

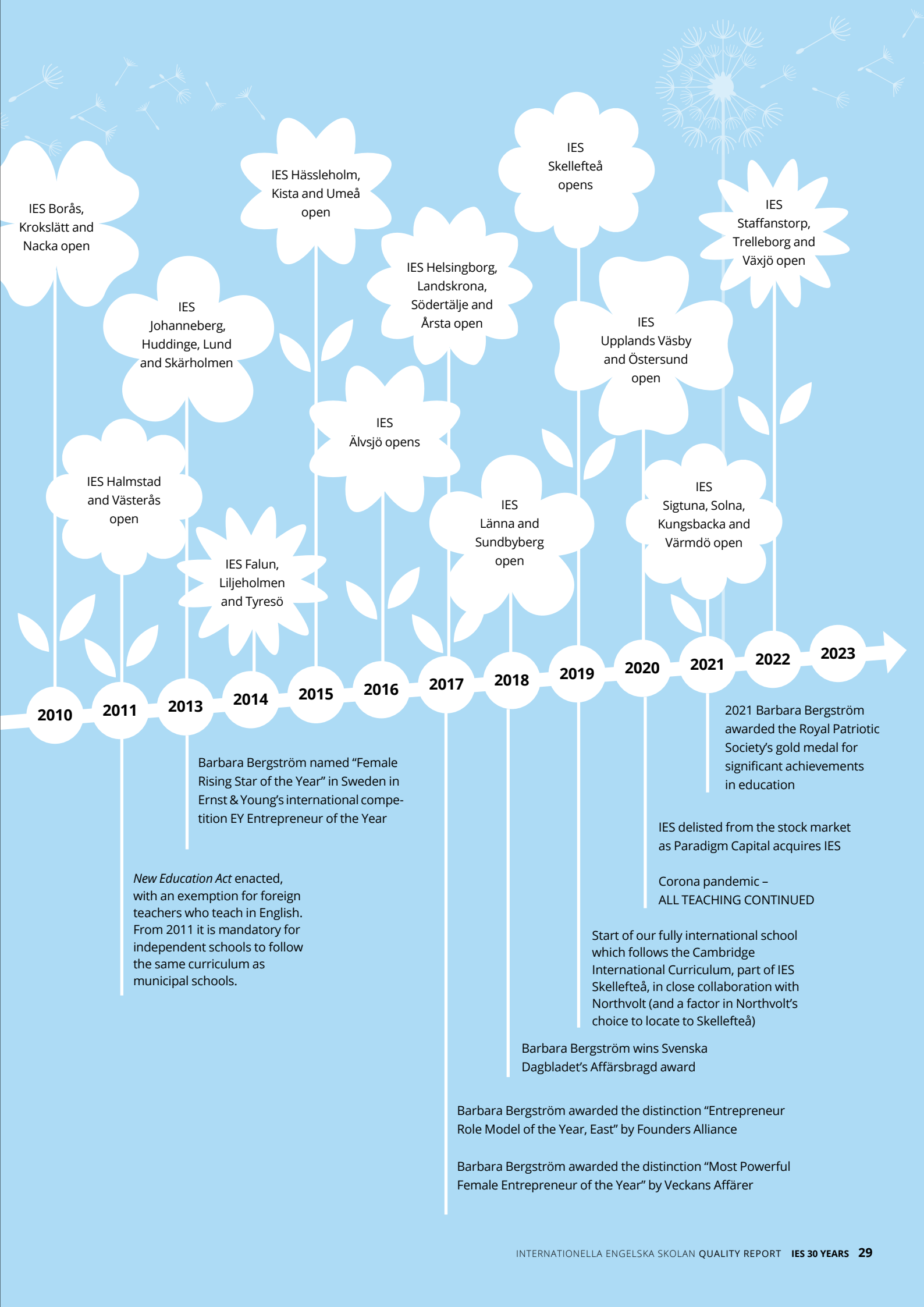




# 30 YEARS, 46 SCHOOLS 32 000 STUDENTS







IES Borås,  
Krokslätt and  
Nacka open

IES Hässleholm,  
Kista and Umeå  
open

IES  
Skellefteå  
opens

IES  
Staffanstorps,  
Trelleborg and  
Växjö open

IES  
Johanneberg,  
Huddinge, Lund  
and Skärholmen

IES Helsingborg,  
Landskrona,  
Södertälje and  
Årsta open

IES  
Upplands Väsby  
and Östersund  
open

IES  
Älvsjö opens

IES Halmstad  
and Västerås  
open

IES Falun,  
Liljeholmen  
and Tyresö

IES  
Länna and  
Sundbyberg  
open

IES  
Sigtuna, Solna,  
Kungsbacka and  
Värmdö open

2010

2011

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

2023

Barbara Bergström named "Female Rising Star of the Year" in Sweden in Ernst & Young's international competition EY Entrepreneur of the Year

*New Education Act* enacted, with an exemption for foreign teachers who teach in English. From 2011 it is mandatory for independent schools to follow the same curriculum as municipal schools.

2021 Barbara Bergström awarded the Royal Patriotic Society's gold medal for significant achievements in education

IES delisted from the stock market as Paradigm Capital acquires IES

Corona pandemic – ALL TEACHING CONTINUED

Start of our fully international school which follows the Cambridge International Curriculum, part of IES Skellefteå, in close collaboration with Northvolt (and a factor in Northvolt's choice to locate to Skellefteå)

Barbara Bergström wins Svenska Dagbladet's Affärsbragd award

Barbara Bergström awarded the distinction "Entrepreneur Role Model of the Year, East" by Founders Alliance

Barbara Bergström awarded the distinction "Most Powerful Female Entrepreneur of the Year" by Veckans Affärer



*IES founder Barbara Bergström:*

## **"PROUD TO HAVE CHANGED THE LIVES OF SO MANY STUDENTS"**

"The most important thing for me has never been for our students to become lawyers, doctors or professors. It has been for them to develop into knowledgeable and responsible individuals who can enter adulthood with self-confidence." This is what IES founder Barbara Bergström says as she summarises the growth of one of Sweden's most successful independent schools 30 years after it started. "The main proof that I was right in my convictions on how education should be conducted is that thousands of students that have graduated since then have testified to how our schools have radically changed their lives," she continues.

Informal chit-chat with students. A quick hug. The piece of paper that is hastily picked up off the shiny, polished floor. Walking with Barbara Bergström through one of the IES schools gives you a clear image of the culture that she determinedly built up during her active years since the start in 1993.

"It is based on respect for the students and that their school life should equip them with the best possible tools for adulthood – in the form of knowledge and social skills. Our task is to create a safe environment where adults act with warm authority and where learning is possible," she says.

"If the environment is appealing then we'll automatically tend to take care of it. Additionally, it's my task to be a role model for everybody in the school. We expect strong commitment from both teachers and students, so all school leaders must show the same level of commitment."

### **BUILDING THE CULTURE IS CRITICAL**

Entrepreneurship and working hard to achieve your goals comes naturally to Barbara Bergström. She's the American who came to Sweden, started working as a science teacher and became frustrated at the lack of leadership she witnessed in Swedish schools, so decided to start a school herself. The objective was to create a safe and orderly school environment where teachers can teach, and students learn. There would be high academic demands made of the students and a substantial proportion of the teaching would take place in English.

"My vision was to build a school that encourages students to develop to their full potential – both academically and personally – irrespective of their background. I wanted to create an alternative to the prevailing view; that is, that children manage best without adults and that knowledge is something the children should seek themselves.

"I knew from the beginning that it was enormously important to create a school culture that would foster this and that every detail was important. Everything counts, from daily routines such as the principal standing in the school entrance and welcoming the students by name, eating lunch – which should be nutritious – with them, to adults always being present in the entire school to create a safe and calm environment.

"Children truly appreciate the stability this creates. If the adults don't decide the rules then the gang leaders take over."

Since the first school opened in Roslagstull in Stockholm 30 years ago, a further 46 schools have been established across Sweden, from Trelleborg in the south to Skellefteå in the north, and there are more planned. A total of 50,000 students have graduated from year nine at one of these schools. Demand from parents, students and municipalities has been strong during IES' growth.

### **LEADERSHIP THE MOST CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR**

According to Barbara Bergström, the most critical success factor is clear leadership and a leadership style that is characterised by discipline and warmth – which she refers to as "tough love". ▶



“Leadership is everything, our schools are dependent on strong, good leaders who can ensure that our culture and our values are upheld, and who in turn can attract and retain good teachers. We have to work hard for our culture, every minute of every day,” she says.

“As a leader you have to deal with difficult situations. For me the most difficult thing of all over the years has been finding the right leaders – and when the leadership of a school doesn’t function properly – if the leadership doesn’t work, then the school won’t work. We have managed to recruit many truly fantastic cultural ambassadors who are really passionate about IES.

**WORTH ALL THE BATTLES**

Several of the procedures that IES introduced early on, and that were criticised at the time by the authorities, have not only become generally accepted, they have also later been introduced into municipal schools as the norm, for example grades in earlier years, regular reviews with the students and parents and a ban on mobile phones in the classroom. Research has also shown that students searching for knowledge themselves is ineffective learning, and has highlighted the link between hand and brain, in other words that the ability to learn improves through writing information down.

*“It is based on respect for the students and that their school life should equip them with the best possible tools for adulthood – in the form of knowledge and social skills”*

“There has been a broad opinion when it comes to the view of schooling in Sweden that creativity and discipline are mutually exclusive. This is completely wrong – on the contrary order stimulates creativity and additionally leads to pleasure as it is much easier to focus on your creative power if nothing else competes for your attention,” says Ms Bergström.

When asked whether she thinks that creating IES has been worth all the work she answers that she wouldn’t hesitate to

do it again, and also with her husband Hans Bergström, the former editor-in-chief of Dagens Nyheter, who played an important role in the development of IES from 2001 to 2019. The American not-for-profit founda-

tion that the Bergström couple founded is currently the largest minority shareholder in IES with around 14 per cent of the shares.

“We have been a very good team and complemented each other well. The development of the organisation during those years required Hans’ analytical skills and unlimited work capacity, just as much as my conviction and soul.

“We both hope that IES will continue as a quality school with the same strength and determination, even once we are no longer part of the picture,” she says. //







*Generation Alpha:*

## **“NEW DEMANDS ON SCHOOLS WITH STUDENTS WHO ARE HYPER-INDIVIDUALISTIC AND HAVE SOCIAL MEDIA LIFESTYLES”**

After Millennials and Generation Z comes Generation Alpha, children born between 2010 and 2025, a generation weaned on ultra-fast internet connections and social media. These youngsters are often characterised as being open, tolerant and curious about the world; while constant connectivity has an adverse effect on their ability to concentrate. “This puts new demands on schools, such as expanding use of visual aids and tailoring the teaching to individuals,” says global generational expert Henry Rose Lee.

“In 2025, once all of Generation Alpha has been born, they will total more than two billion, the largest generation in history. Today’s technology also makes them the most globally connected generation ever,” Ms Rose Lee explained during an IES 30-year jubilee seminar.

Generation Alpha is the first generation born into the digital world, and social media. They move seamlessly between the physical and digital world, and have never known anything else. For Gen Z, who grew up while social media was being established, it is a tool; for Gen Alpha it is a lifestyle.

“Their constant connectivity with the world through social platforms means they are expected to be social, global and mobile. They want to work, study and journey between different countries and careers. Their openness is affected by the fact that many have parents from different cultures – others live with new partners and in new family constellations. Family, cultural and gender identities are becoming looser,” says Ms Rose Lee.

### **MORE SCREEN TIME – LESS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Increased screen time brings consequences including decreased physical activity and reduced ability to focus and concentrate.

“Today, there is so much that distracts and demands the attention of children, and this affects their ability to centre their attention and to focus deeply when required, which is detrimental to the learning process.

“They have also been shaped during an era of hyper-individualism and adaptation, which affects expectations about both life and school,” says Ms Rose Lee.

### **THIS PLACES NEW DEMANDS ON SCHOOLS**

“Schools and teachers have a vital role to play in nurturing,



supporting and developing Generation Alpha.

They can help raise the level of physical and mental well-being of this youngest cohort of students. In terms of physical sessions, there are so many things that are only possible through physical connections and interactions. These include socialisation, collaboration, teaching empathy and giving students a deeper understanding of complex inter-personal relationships.”

### **SCHOOL LIFE IS CRITICAL**

Ms Rose Lee explains; to be successful with these citizens of the future, teachers have to interact with the students in ways that respond to the very specific circumstances of this blended physical and digital world. One powerful practice is to use more visual aids – as this generation is extremely visual. Another is for teachers to tailor and customise teaching. For example, certain students may only assimilate knowledge in bite-sized chunks.

“It is absolutely clear that, even for this digitalised generation, schools and teachers constitute an incredibly important part of the lives of Generation Alpha and are critically significant to their future.”

“By learning social skills in a safe and supportive environment, Alpha students have the chance to develop team spirit, build communication skills, formulate and articulate opinions and ideas, and improve personal focus and decision-making. They also get the opportunity to develop physically, emotionally and creatively through increased interplay with others, limited screen time, and regular games, sports and outdoor activities.

“Combined with their digital skills and openness to the world, this gives them a strong deck of cards for the future. Teacher-directed learning has a very important part to play in all of this”, says Ms Rose Lee. //



*Focus on more reading:*

## **“OUR TASK IS TO DEVELOP READING PROFICIENCY”**

Research shows that reading is important to students’ language development and for their ability to imagine, empathise and sympathise. “Cracking the reading code gives children self-confidence, self-esteem and the ability to think logically and creatively.” This is the view of Karin Wannerud, the library coordinator at IES, Katarina Radosevic, coordinator of Swedish as a second language at IES Krokslätt, and Malin Riise, Swedish teacher and head of subject at IES Borås. They are jointly leading IES’ initiative to increase students’ reading proficiency and desire to read.

It is not only about being able to decode the words, but also understanding what they read and being able to interpret things that are not directly expressed in the text, i.e. reading between the lines. This is essential for the students to succeed in their studies in all subjects. Students’ language development and reading comprehension are a matter for all teachers of all subjects. Reading also brings about new experiences, meetings and thoughts.

“By reading the children train to think, and develop their analytical and critical thinking skills. This is not least important when it comes to forming a view of all the information which social media constantly drowns them in,” says Katarina Radosevic.

As an emigrant from the Balkans, with Swedish as her second language, she has good insight into the importance of improving your language skills in a new home country.

### **FOCUS ON MORE READING**

In IES’ initiative to increase students’ reading, which was initiated in 2022, Katarina Radosevic collaborates with her teacher colleague Malin Riise, and Karin Wannerud the recently appointed school library coordinator.

“One of our tasks is to coordinate initiatives and share knowledge in the field. Many great things have already been done at different schools – we’re now coordinating these. Our goal is to get the entire organisation on board. ▶

Additionally, with the help of new digital tools, we can analyse every student's individual needs regarding their reading skills and provide extra support if needed,"says Malin Riise.

"It's also important for the parents to get involved in the children's reading development. For example, if they read aloud to their children this can have several positive effects on language progress. It can also improve children's imagination and ability to form ideas, spoken language and vocabulary, storytelling and the ability to express thoughts, interest in pictures and texts, and their ability to understand their environment. I read aloud to my students for a while every week," she continues.

#### **PROVIDE THE RIGHT LITERATURE**

Reading aloud can entice children to want to read for themselves – and this is where the school library is important. According to Karin Wannerud, the library first has to offer the right literature that engages the children, and then the librarian should visit the classrooms and "market" the library.

"By providing a stimulating reading environment and a wide variety of texts, our school libraries can support the school's reading education. If we manage to get the students to want to read, it becomes natural skills training for later studies. We're trying to bring about a desire to read," she says.

"It's important that we're attentive to what attracts the students. As an example, today we're seeing that many children don't only want to read fiction, they're very interested in non-fiction – probably to counter balance all the

"fake news" they're fed with. They also like reading biographies about their idols. There's other new phenomena too, for example we've noticed that a group of girls who were previously not too strong at reading have had their eyes opened to the romance genre via TikTok," she continues.

#### **DEMOCRATIC RIGHT TO LEARN TO READ**

The Education Act states that we must strive for lifelong learning, and if students don't take to reading then we miss that opportunity. Those who struggle just to get through the texts in social studies books, mathematics and so on start to associate reading with a sense of meaninglessness. But reading is about being affected and engaged, opening up new possibilities and thoughts.

"It means there can be an immense gap in the classroom between those who read and those who don't – and that's what we want to avoid via this initiative. Learning to read is a democratic right for all children", says Ms Radosevic. //

#### **FACTS: IES SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

IES has well-equipped school libraries with generous opening hours in all 46 schools. So far 42 of these school libraries are staffed with specialist library staff (70 per cent trained librarians). Many librarians have extensive training, either as a teacher or in another relevant field. All of this means that IES is well-prepared when the law on mandatory school libraries and trained staff comes into force.





*Peter Fernaeus, Teacher of the Year, 2023:*

## “IMPORTANT TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CLASS”

“I’m not a finished product as a teacher, there’s always something that can be improved.” So says Peter Fernaeus, a social studies teacher at IES Sundsvall and the winner of the title Teacher of the Year. The prize is based on nominations from students and is awarded at the annual Teachers’ Gala.

The non-profit Teachers’ Gala gives Sweden’s students a unique channel to show what they appreciate about their education. When the gala was first held in 2016, 700 children nominated their teachers. That number rose to almost 45,000 nominations in 2023.

One of the motivations that gave Peter Fernaeus the prestigious title in 2023 stated: “My teacher deserves to win as he has inspired me to learn new things and to care about the world and my fellow human beings in a way that I never have done before.”

With 17 years as a teacher under his belt, he also has some advice to share with younger colleagues: “Allow yourself to make mistakes, get advice from experien-



ced colleagues, use all the resources your school offers, don’t be afraid to try out new things, and most importantly of all, build a relationship with your class. You must be interested in your subject – if I’m not enthusiastic when I teach about the world wars, ancient Greece or Hinduism, my students will see right through me,” he says.

The prize does not stop his aspiration to constantly improve either.

“I know that I have yet to have my toughest or my best class. But IES gives you the tools and encourages you to constantly develop. No other school that I’ve worked at before offers so much opportunity to improve in your job,” says Mr Fernaeus. //



## ***“Demanding respect breeds respect”***

**DR. KEBROM TEKLE**, CIVICS TEACHER, IECS

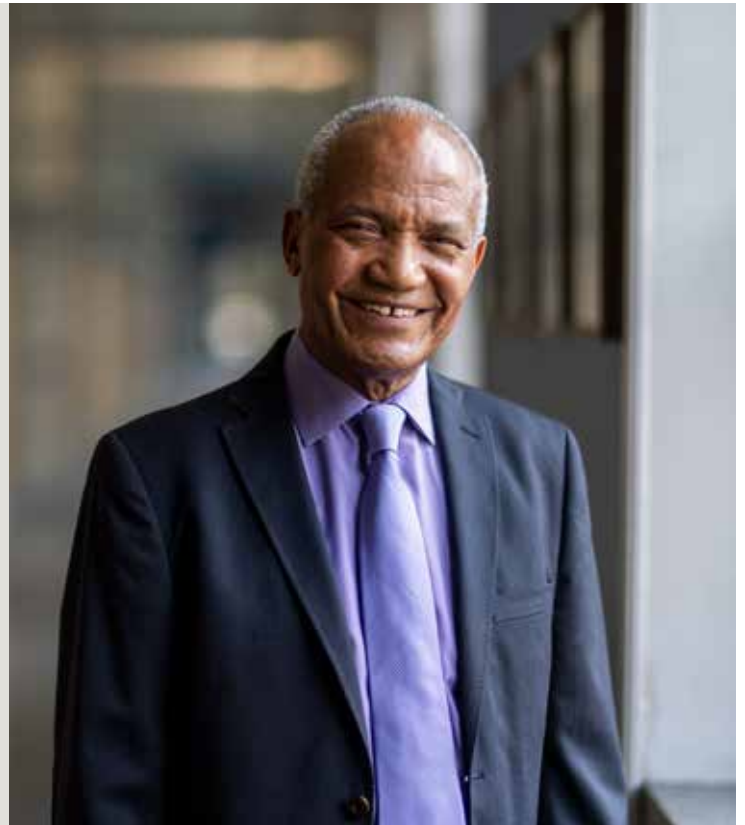
**After 50 years as a teacher, Dr Kebrom Tekle is still passionate about his profession. And even though he is 70 years old he has no plans to retire from his teaching position at Internationella Engelska Gymnasiet (IEGS) on Södermalm in Stockholm. “My love for the teaching profession is never-ending – I was born a teacher,” he says.**

In Eritrea where Kebrom Tekle was born and raised, teachers are considered as being highest up on the social ladder – second only to God.

“That may have been why already as a child I wanted to be a teacher,” he says and laughs.

Even if the road has sometimes been bumpy, his determination to become a teacher has always been there. It took him from Eritrea to Södermalm, from a teaching post at a university in Addis Ababa, via a SIDA scholarship in tropical ecology that led to a doctoral degree at Uppsala University, to being forced to seek asylum – and eventually ending up as a popular upper secondary school teacher in geography, environmental studies and civics at IECS, where he has worked for 15 years. Strong motivation and energy are also attributes he wants to convey to his students.

“I am a fighter myself and I believe this spreads to the students. When they thank me because they have prog-



ressed and perform better, I respond that they shouldn't thank me – they should thank themselves; it's they who have fought hard”, he says.

“I have always set clear rules for how things are done in my classroom – caps off, mobile phones off and once the door is shut it remains shut until the lesson is over. My experience is that demanding respect breeds respect.”





*IES organisation:*

## A STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHERS

The success of IES is built on our ability to create schools that are effective workplaces where teachers can teach, and students learn. We ensure this through clear processes and procedures for identifying, recruiting and developing the best and most engaged leaders and teachers.

### CLEAR LEADERSHIP – THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Internationella Engelska Skolan is strongly driven by its core values, which permeate the culture and guide the organisation. The most important duty of the organisation's leaders is to inspire people and ensure they uphold our core values in their work. That's why IES places great emphasis on recruiting principals – the key leaders of each school – who live and lead according to these. The role of the principals is to ensure that IES' core values are converted into actions. Principals have full responsibility for their individual schools and staff.

It is their duty to recruit competent staff, motivate them to work unflinchingly to foster students' academic and social development and ensure that they comply with IES' core values. They recruit teachers who are passionate about their

subjects and who inspire their students. IES principals are present throughout the school day, from welcoming students in the morning to being around in the corridors and the dining hall during the course of the day. In other words, the principals have a clear role with a great deal of responsibility.

So that new school principals have the best possible start and a chance to live up to the high expectations placed on them, they take a number of introduction courses during their first few months. These are focused on important matters including student health, labour law, quality, the Education Act and safety. Since there are 46 schools there are also 46 leaders, and this means the principals have a unique opportunity to collaborate and share experiences. Along with the other leaders, and with the same focus and conviction, they work regularly and consistently to develop their schools. ▶

**82%**

of IES teachers have a degree in teaching

(the average in Sweden is 65%)

They are also given support through an internal mentorship programme. For the past few years, IES has also run a leadership programme for future leaders within the organisation.

### AN ATTRACTIVE EMPLOYER

IES works actively to be an attractive employer, a place where competitive employment terms and a good working environment are a given. Providing a safe and stimulating working environment is of vital importance for attracting competent and engaged employees to the schools.

A good working environment for the teachers requires clarity in how things are done so that

everybody works according to the same principles inside and outside the classroom. It also means ensuring that teachers never feel alone in their professional role, which can sometimes be a vulnerable position. The IES model entails having support staff in place, including a team focused on student health and guidance which works alongside teachers and supports them in matters that fall outside of their specialist areas. This allows the teachers to focus on teaching and makes work more enjoyable. The IES organisation also consists of heads of departments and heads of year to ensure quality in teaching and in the school environment. This type of organisational structure is unique compared with other schools. It is also one of the keys to our good academic results and the high number of students who qualify for upper secondary school.

Recently recruited teachers commence their employment with an introductory course, which focuses on IES' core values and methodology. For international teachers, the programme

also includes the Swedish school system and national curriculum. Every academic year begins with an introductory week when we bring all staff together to ensure engagement in IES' core values and focus on the areas of development for the year ahead.

IES recruits many talented teachers from other countries and helps them to settle in so that their introduction to Sweden goes as smoothly as possible. For instance, IES gives them information on how the Swedish system and society

works and how to find somewhere to live. We also help with arranging visas and opening bank accounts. Many teachers

*"We must ensure that teachers never feel alone in their professional role"*

choose to remain at IES and make Sweden their long-term home. Teachers from other countries are often attracted to Sweden by the beautiful nature and secure conditions the country offers, and to IES due to our profile and culture. Recruiting teachers from outside of Sweden is also a way to deal with the teacher shortage in Sweden.

Staff turnover within IES remains stable. Across all employees it was 25 per cent in 2022/2023 (20 per cent in the previous year) and for permanent employees it was 15 per cent (13 per cent in the previous year).

IES works with a partner for preventive and rehabilitative health care and offers employees a support hotline that is available 24/7. To promote transparency and responsible behaviour, IES uses a whistleblower function provided by an independent third party. IES carries out an employee pay survey to ensure that there is no unjustified unequal pay between women and men. //



*"We analyse all students' needs and prior knowledge so that we can help every individual in the best way. We also continuously follow up how they develop over time to ensure that each one of them gets enough support.*

*Some of the children who come here don't know any, or are very weak in, Swedish, and maybe lack English proficiency too. We have to be innovative and creative to help them catch up with their classmates. For instance, we work with visual support aids, which have been shown to be effective in learning.*

*We also make efforts to stimulate reading and get the children to visit the school library. We organise author visits and book clubs, which many students enjoy."*

**SEMKA LJUBIJANKIC**  
ACADEMIC MANAGER YEARS 7-9, IES ESKILSTUNA





***“We tackle issues head on in this school”***

**JIMMY CEBULA**, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, IES ESKILSTUNA

**“We tackle problems head on in this school. An important part of our success with the students and the school stems from the students always having safe adults around with whom they can communicate.**

Everybody must feel seen – and know that safe adults are always there who pay attention to what happens in the school and for them to turn to.”

Given the social problems in the area in Eskilstuna where our school is located, it is particularly important to provide the students a safe school environment with adults who are

good role models. In addition to a high level of academic quality in the teaching, it is also important to stimulate them outside the classroom with fritids (before and after school care which follows a pedagogic curriculum) activities that interest them. I myself compete in arm wrestling, which some of them think is fun to test out with me.

We collaborate intensively with social services and the police in Eskilstuna within the SSPF project (school, social services, police, fritids) to prevent addiction and criminality amongst the children and youth in Fröslunda. Our goal is for all youngsters to get proper schooling and have a life free from crime and drugs. Through this collaboration we can quickly identify behaviours that cause concern amongst the child's family, school, police or fritids staff. We can then take action and work with the family and social services to prevent a young person getting stuck in criminality.



*“I like it here, there's a really good atmosphere in the school and in my class. We usually help each other with homework, me and my best friend often Facetime each other after school to help each other. It's fun and makes it easier.*

*It was a bit hard with the English at first, but after about a month it went fine and it's not a problem any more.”*

**ISABELLA**, CLASS 5C, IES JÖNKÖPING



# 3 600

IES employees as at September 2022, an increase of 3 per cent compared to September 2021.

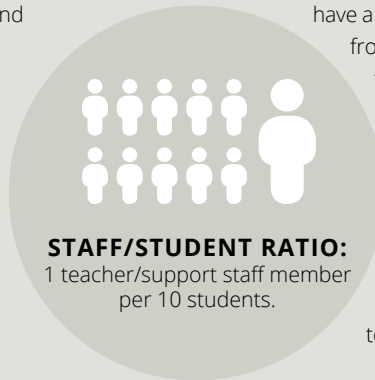
# 2 300

teachers employed as at September 2022, same as at September 2021.

# 969

international teachers employed at IES as at September 2022.

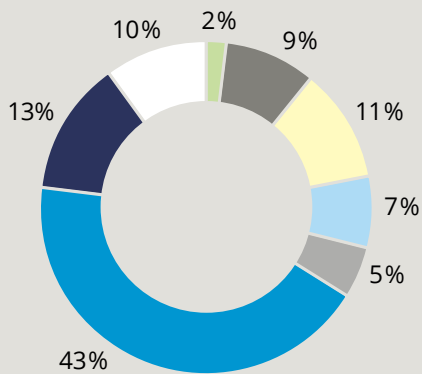
IES' employees mainly come from Sweden and English-speaking countries such as Canada, the US and the UK. Around 2,300 of IES' 3,600 employees are teachers. 82 per cent of the teachers have a teaching degree, of these 43 per cent were educated at a Swedish university and 39 per cent hold a degree in teaching from another country. Across Sweden's compulsory schools as a whole, an average of 65 per cent of the teachers



have a teaching degree. IES encourages teachers from other countries to apply for a Swedish teaching qualification.

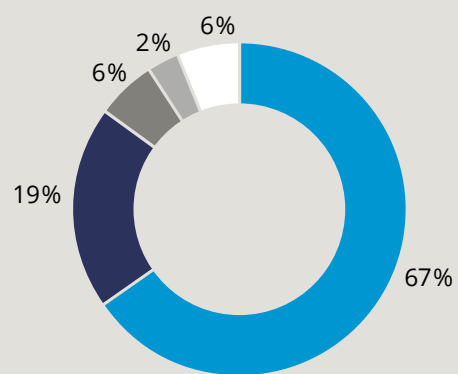
The IES model entails having support staff in place, including a team focused on student health and guidance which works alongside teachers and supports them in matters that fall outside of their specialist areas. This helps the teachers to focus on teaching.

**Teachers' origins**



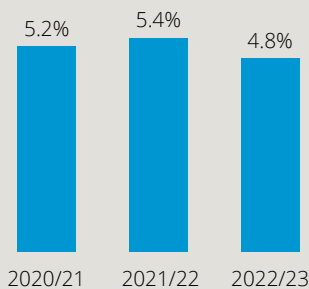
Sweden UK and Ireland USA Canada South Africa Australia and New Zealand Rest of Europe Rest of the world

**Employees per role**



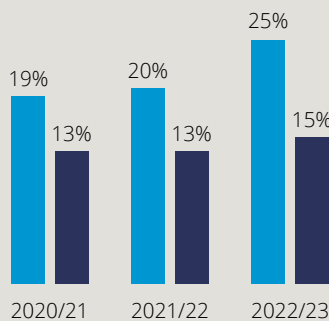
Teachers Student support Administration School leaders Other school staff

**Absenteeism**



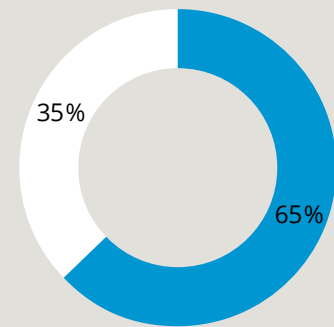
All staff

**Staff turnover**



All staff Permanent employees

**Gender distribution employees**



Men Women

Gabriel Heller Sahlgren, researcher:

## "SWEDEN HAS ONE OF THE MOST EQUITABLE EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN THE OECD"

Overall, Sweden has one of the most equitable education systems in the OECD, and is in line with the other Nordic countries. This is according to Gabriel Heller Sahlgren, researcher at the Swedish Research Institute of Industrial Economics (Institutet för Näringslivsforskning) and London School of Economics. In a couple of reports he indicates that the negative image of the level of knowledge in Swedish schools that has dominated during recent years is not correct.

During the 2000s, the image of falling academic quality has defined the Swedish school debate. For a long time this image was indeed consistent with reality as the performance of Swedish students fell dramatically in international tests, according to Gabriel Heller Sahlgren.

"But my research shows that later, from about 2010, results in all the international surveys have improved, in particular for native-born students – who currently perform among the best in the world compared to corresponding students in other countries," he says.

According to Mr Heller Sahlgren, politicians and the media are only now starting to realise that the changed demographics have affected Swedish students' results.

### THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND HAS NOT INCREASED

In his report, Mr Heller Sahlgren has analysed the PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) to see how equity has developed and how it compares to other OECD countries after taking into account variations in student composition derived from the changed demographics.

"It shows that the impact of students' socio-economic background on their knowledge has not increased at all since the early 2000s. In the PISA in 2018, Swedish schooling was one of the most equitable in the OECD, and just as equitable as the school systems in other Nordic countries, including

Finland, when comparing like with like.



"It's perhaps even more important that in the latest PISA assessment, equity in the Swedish school system held up well compared to other countries, when we compare like with like. Overall, Sweden has one of the most equitable school systems in the OECD, with about the same levels of equity as the rest of the Nordic countries," he says.

### NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

According to Mr Heller Sahlgren, the major challenge for Swedish schools today is how we can manage to compensate for the more demographically complicated student base.

"The truth is that there are no simple solutions to the equity problems that this has brought about – and schools alone will not be able to deal with these. The first, essential step in identifying solutions, though, is to accept the formulation of the problem. We have to start discussing the Swedish school system's outcomes honestly.

"In another report I present research from the US, England and Chile, which shows that the "No Excuses" model of education could be a way forward. The model is described as "warmly traditional" and is based on high expectations of the students' behaviour and academic performance. Schools that use this model, many of which are located in vulnerable areas, often succeed well academically and the effects are frequently greatest among students with foreign backgrounds and weak language skills. //

