

English summary  
of Fafo-rapport 2020:05

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## An inclusive pre-school and school environment

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This report provides a first overview of the data that describe how the participants assess the three programmes included in the competence package for an inclusive pre-school and school environment, launched by the Directorate of Education.

In the report we apply the same definition of 'bullying' as in the NOU 2015:2 white paper: 'physically or socially negative acts that are performed repeatedly over time by one person or a group of persons and are targeted against someone who is unable to defend themselves in the given situation' (NOU 2015:2, p. 32). The background for the report lies in the stricter legal regulations that have been enacted to ensure a safe and positive school environment and prevent bullying and other forms of abuse, often referred to as 'Section 9A', and which were initiated by the Djupedal Commission (NOU 2015:2). Part of the regulatory amendment consisted in establishing local accountability for prevention, detection and handling of bullying and other forms of abuse at their locus. In addition, it was realised that owners/authorities, principals/managers and teachers/kindergarten staff need better competence on these matters. One of the responses to this need was to develop a competence package consisting of various types of competence enhancement measures that target the various parties involved.

The competence package provided by the Directorate of Education includes the Learning Environment Project, a session-based programme and a web-based programme; these constitute three of several different learning environment and anti-bullying programmes (Utdanningsdirektoratet.no). In the Learning Environment Project, the participants receive a great deal of support and follow-up, which is provided through nationwide sessions and a separate guidance team composed of experts from the Centre for Learning Environment. The session-based programme also provides a great deal of support in the form of nationwide workshops and a dedicated resource person. In the web-based programme, the participants undergo training through videos of lectures and other learning material presented through a web-based solution.

The research questions we seek to answer in the report are:

1. How does the local implementation of competence enhancement function in the programme 'Inclusive pre-school and school environment'?
2. Which challenges have appeared in the local implementation of competence enhancement in the programme 'Inclusive pre-school and school environment'?

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The analyses in the report are based on both qualitative and quantitative sources of data. First, we sent a web-based questionnaire to participants in all three programmes prior to commencement. This kind of baseline measurement is crucial for identifying any changes, as well as for gaining some insight into the participants' expectations before the training started. Second, we have followed a single cohort of participants in each of the three programmes, by attending national workshops, workgroup meetings and local seminars. Third, we have selected two case municipalities in each programme. In each of these municipalities we have conducted qualitative interviews with municipal employees, school managers, teachers, principals and kindergarten staff. At the time of writing, not all data collection work was completed. This means that the ambition of this report is to provide a snapshot of the data collected, rather than analyses of correlations and causes.

### **The Learning Environment Project**

The Learning Environment Project started in the autumn of 2013, when it was provided as an option to 23 schools in ten municipalities. All of these were schools that had experienced consistently high rates of bullying. Since the start-up, the Directorate of Education has completed three training cohorts, while cohort no. 4, which we have followed, started their training in August 2018 in 37 schools and 16 kindergartens. A key element in this learning environment project is that the initiative should provide extra support to kindergartens and schools that face greater challenges than others in terms of their learning environment. The project can thus be understood as a targeted effort for those kindergartens and schools that need it most.

The data that we have collected show that the participants consider the learning environment project to work best when the communicated content is specific and helps provide new tools that can be used to handle, uncover or prevent bullying or offer advice in individual cases. This applies to the schools in particular. One of the methods in the learning environment project is to provide all participants with an advisory team that will follow them up. This initiative provides the greatest degree of follow-up, and many participants are greatly satisfied with their advisory team. On the other hand, however, we can see that there is some disagreement regarding the role to be filled by the advisors. Many participants find the project content to be of high quality, and some also argue that the ability to refer to academic knowledge will help strengthen their arguments for change in their own school or kindergarten. Others, however, report that in their opinion, the content is too general in nature.

Most likely, this is a matter of how the project is organised. We have seen that one reason why the competence provided does not always match the participants in the way they might wish, is that those who are selected for participation are

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not always those who need to face the stressful situations on a daily basis. When the training is attended mainly by managers, the competence will not always reach the teachers and assistants in schools and kindergartens. A further key element is that many of those who participate in the learning environment project also attend other programmes.

### **The session-based programme**

This programme is organised in the form of national and local workshops. In these settings, the participants shall be provided with competence through options and lectures, but the venues should also provide room for shared reflection and exchange of experiences. The session-based programme can be considered to constitute a general competence enhancement measure, in contrast to the Learning Environment Project, which was intended for participants who were facing especially challenging situations.

In the period from 2017 to 2020, four cohorts have attended the programme. Cohort no. 4 will not complete it until 2021. Cohort no. 5 has not yet enrolled, but will most likely do so in 2020. In the first three cohorts, approximately 120 municipalities with 600 kindergartens and 500 schools attended the session-based programme. The third cohort runs from January 2019 to December 2020.

The session-based programme applies a complex methodology and consists of national and regional workshops, as well as development work in the relevant kindergartens and schools, which receive financial support for a local resource person. In addition, it involves establishment of a so-called learning network consisting of schools and kindergartens that can collaborate and support each other in their development efforts by forming an arena for exchange of experience, reflection and professional development. Similar to the other programmes, participation in the session-based programme should produce permanent change in practices.

The results show that on the whole, the participants in the session-based programme are very satisfied. Before they started, they had clear expectations for the programme in terms of its ability to provide them with better competence to prevent, uncover and address bullying and abuse. Moreover, more than seven out of ten believe that they possess sufficient knowledge of the topic of inclusive pre-school and school environment after the implementation of the programme. Virtually all participants claim to have more knowledge about this topic now, compared to before they attended the programme.

On the other hand, some also point out that the programme may be too general in nature, which makes it difficult to directly apply this new competence. It is also pointed out that there might be a substantial gap between the national level and the ambition to achieve changes in each kindergarten or school. One response to this will be stronger leadership. Another and more relevant response

will be to use the local resource persons. This and previous evaluations show, however, that the way in which these resource persons function varies considerably. This is a matter of differences in the degree of involvement, accessibility and competence.

### **The web-based programme**

The web-based programme targets kindergartens, schools, authorities and owners who wish to address this topic with support from a web-based programme and video seminars. It is also recommended that this programme be taken as an extension of the session-based programme. A special feature of the web-based programme is that it sets no limits on the number of participants. In the kindergartens and schools that have participated to date, all employees have been included.

The programme was developed by Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences. In January 2018, a total of 27 schools started the programme. Another 34 schools joined in the autumn of 2018, while 68 kindergartens also enrolled. Cohort no. 2 started in the autumn of 2019. In cohorts no. 1 and 2, the web-based programme was pilot tested and adjusted, and the third version will be launched in 2020. The informants in our interviews have participated in the second version. The training structure consists of three semesters that must be completed within 2.5 years. A key element in the training programme is that it is contingent on close collaboration between principals/leaders and owners, and that the development is assessed during the process. Another key element in the programme includes assignments for reflection and trials, which help ensure relevance and local uptake. The programme is concluded by each participant writing a final test paper, which is assessed by a committee at the university.

The participants in the web-based programme had approximately the same expectations prior to start-up as those in the other two programmes. They felt that they needed to improve their competence, more than to establish networks and have a venue to reflect on the issues involved. The interviews we have conducted to date indicate that the web-based programme is of high academic quality. Another strength of the web-based programme is that it involves all employees in the enrolled school or kindergarten. This appears to be an advantage with a view to ensuring collective competence enhancement. The challenges in the programme may be related to the fact that it is too general. It is in the nature of this programme that it consists of decentralised learning, meaning that the participants themselves need to take responsibility for making the content locally relevant.

In general, this report points to an important dilemma between availability on the one hand and follow-up on the other. In the way in which these programmes are organised today, one programme scores high on availability, but low on

follow-up (web-based), while the two others score in the opposite direction (the learning environment project and the session-based programme). Would it be possible to develop a programme that prioritised availability, for example in the form of web-based training, while maintaining close follow-up especially for those municipalities that need it most?

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