

# What you need to know about bilingualism and special schools



## Bilingual sign language environment enhances participation

At a bilingual special school, students are taught in two languages, Swedish Sign Language and Swedish in written form. Both are living languages, and they enjoy equal status in school activities. For our students who are deaf or hard of hearing, their opportunities for participation and accessibility in society are strengthened when they develop both Swedish Sign Language and Swedish. They can switch between the languages to communicate with the outside world, seek new knowledge, influence their situation and develop their personality. Based on the situation and the context, they will be able to choose the most convenient language for communication and participation throughout their lives. The freedom of choice becomes greater when a sign language interpreter can be used, for higher education, for example.

A sign language environment is an environment in which we use sign language. A common language makes it possible for everyone to be involved. Apart from being able to communicate with each other, students have the benefit of being able to see and follow dialogue between others. This helps develop language skills, social skills, and knowledge of the world. Feelings of participation, identity and security are strengthened in an environment where

everyone can communicate and be understood in sign language. In a signing environment, the sign language culture is always present, and staff and students are important linguistic role models. At our bilingual special schools, our students get a unique linguistic environment that is important for their language acquisition and cognitive development.

Language and culture belong together. A bilingual special school recognises the cultures of both languages, but places particular emphasis on the sign language culture, as most of the schools' students do not encounter it outside of school. The purpose of paying particular attention to sign language culture, including poetry, stage and visual arts in Swedish Sign Language, is that our students get to meet different role models and strengthen their identity. Sign language culture also means that students are taught how a signed language is structured, how to take turns in a conversation, and how to use the language in social settings.

## Support for the development of bilingualism

Swedish Sign Language and written Swedish are common languages for all students at a bilingual special school. Students attending one of our bilingual special schools have varied language back-

grounds, and therefore we organise the teaching so that it benefits the bilingual development of each student in accordance with our plan for bilingual education. During the period when students who do not yet know Swedish Sign Language are learning it, they get support so they are able to participate in the lessons.

In language subjects, students can, based on their individual situations, be taught in a spoken language in a classroom with an accessible visual and auditory environment and the use of hearing technologies.

A good visual and auditory environment is required for good communication in teaching. Our teachers have knowledge of, and use, language-development methods in all school subjects.

## Curriculum

Special school education is for ten years, and has its own curriculum, which is largely the same as the curriculum for general compulsory education. The curriculum for special school, preschool class and after-school care 2022 (Lspec22) says that students who are deaf or hard of hearing should have access to a language environment where they can encounter and use both Swedish Sign Language and Swedish in all contexts. There are syllabuses and knowledge requirements that are especially designed for bilingual special schools. These are Swedish Sign Language, Swedish, English and modern languages. The subject Motion and Drama replaces Music. There are also special syllabuses for students who are deaf or hard of hearing in combination with an intellectual disability.

## Six overall goals according to the Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools' plan for the special schools' work with bilingualism

- All teaching is linguistically accessible to all students.

- All interaction takes place in accessible, safe and positive environments.
- All students feel involved in communication and are treated with respect.
- All staff have knowledge of and use language-development methods in all subjects.
- The schools work for two languages and two cultures, and have linguistic and cultural role models in both Swedish Sign Language and Swedish.
- Each school has an ongoing dialogue concerning bilingualism.

## Read more on the web

Our web pages provide in-depth information and videos about what bilingualism implies. Please go to [www.spsm.se](http://www.spsm.se) and search for the Swedish word for bilingualism, "tvåspråkighet".

### Our bilingual schools

- Regional school for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- National school for students who are deaf or hard of hearing in combination with an intellectual disability, and for students with congenital or early-acquired deafblindness.

