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Gunnlaugur Magnússon

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ARTICLE



## Inclusive education and school choice lessons from Sweden

Gunnlaugur Magnússon 

Department of Education, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

### ABSTRACT

While school choice and marketisation have been studied extensively, some areas remain under-researched, for instance, the consequences of choice for the development of inclusive education. The aim of this article is to illustrate the consequences of school choice for inclusive education, as it relates to special education, using Sweden as a case study. The Swedish education system is often raised as inclusive in an international perspective. However, school segregation has been increasing in terms of attainment and pupils' socio-economic-, and immigration backgrounds, groups that are over-represented among SEN-pupils and under-represented among pupils that exercise school choice. This summary of research indicates that the increased segregation in the education system also regards special education. There is a clustering of SEN-pupils at schools with particular profiles and a lower proportion at other types of schools, resources for special educational support are less accessible at independent schools, and school choice is not as open to SEN-pupils as other pupils. These are disconcerting results for an education system renowned for being inclusive.

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School choice; inclusive education; special education; marketisation; Sweden

## Introduction

Research regarding the consequences of school choice for pupils with special educational needs (SEN-pupils) and for the development of inclusive education has been scarce and intermittent (Anastasiou and Kauffman 2009). In particular, there has been a lack of comprehensive overviews. The aim of this article is to illustrate the consequences of school choice for the conception of inclusive education, as it relates to special education, using Sweden as a case study.

Sweden is interesting regarding both school choice and inclusion. Historically, Sweden had a highly centralised education system, emphasising equity and communitarian values. Following several reforms in the 1990s, the Swedish system is now highly decentralised (Englund and Quennerstedt 2008; Lundahl 2010; Wedin 2018). School choice is viewed as a democratic right (SOU 2013:56), and the share of schools with private, for-profit ownership has grown (Dahlstedt and Fejes 2018). Research regarding school choice and marketisation in Sweden is extensive but has focused on school attainment, equity and social segregation while the consequences of marketisation for SEN-pupils have not been studied comprehensively,

**CONTACT** Gunnlaugur Magnússon  [gunnlaugur.magnusson@edu.uu.se](mailto:gunnlaugur.magnusson@edu.uu.se)

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with few exceptions (c.f. Magnússon 2015; Ramberg 2015). This is particularly interesting as Sweden is often raised as exemplary regarding inclusion (EADSNE 2003; OECD 2011).

This article has the following structure. First, some points of departure are sketched, including a perspective on the relationship between inclusion and special education. Second, some methodological considerations are described. Then, the Swedish education system and research of the consequences of marketisation are introduced. Thereafter, the summary of Swedish research of school choice and special and inclusive education is presented. Finally, the results are discussed and conclusions drawn.

The concept of inclusive education was launched as an international policy for the organisation of special education in the Salamanca statement (UNESCO 1994), with a particular focus on increasing participation and limiting unnecessary exclusion of SEN-pupils from peers and local schools. Twenty-five years later, the meaning and scope of inclusion are still contested (Nilholm 2006; Kiuppis Göransson, Malmqvist, and Nilholm 2013; Nilholm and Göransson 2017) and contain several unresolved fields of tension. First is the question of *who* is in focus (Florian 2008; Nilholm 2006), i.e. what pupil groups are supposed to be 'included', and thus currently seen as excluded. This pertains to the idea of inclusive education being a political project with its roots in special education (Kiuppis, 2013; Magnússon 2015). Several researchers have argued that identifying and labelling educational difficulties in order to 'include', is a step towards excluding organisation and practise. Additionally, viewing educational difficulties as due to the attributes of the individuals, rather than contextual or organisational factors, would prolong marginalisation of vulnerable pupil groups (e.g. Ainscow 1998; Haug 1998; Skrtic 1991). This view has led to a widening of the scope of inclusion, a recent claim being that the understanding of inclusion has '*transcended the assumption that inclusion is about children with special needs*' (Qvortrup and Qvortrup 2018, 804) and thus inclusion should rather be about 'all children'. Conversely, it has been argued that, as a political project, inclusion should maintain focus on SEN-pupils (Kiuppis 2013; Miles and Singal 2010), specifically to ensure that these groups are not rendered invisible within the conception of 'all pupils'. However, even a model of inclusion focusing on SEN-pupils must attend to the intersection of social-categories within the conception of the SEN-pupil due to the over-representation of marginalised social-groups among pupils seen as needing special educational support (Dyson and Berhanu 2012, 2070-2073; Cook and Kiru 2018).

Another field of tension regards the organisation of inclusion, where pupil placement is a particular matter of contention. Several researchers have argued that inclusion should not be reduced to the placement of the pupil (Ferguson 2008; Haug 1998; Slee 2011) as 'mainstreaming' (i.e. the placement of SEN-pupils in regular classrooms) fosters a reproduction of exclusion if not accompanied by other organisational and pedagogical measures (Haug 1998; Slee 2011). Recent research-reviews have indicated wide differences as regards the organisational conception of inclusion. For instance, Göransson and Nilholm (2014) noted four types of inclusion within high-impact research:

- (a) focus on placement of SEN-pupils in regular classrooms;
- (b) focus on social and academic needs of SEN-pupils;
- (c) focus on the social/academic needs of all pupils;
- (d) focus on 'creating communities'.

Nilholm and Göransson (2017) later illustrated that definitions of inclusion varied between different types of research. Articles reporting empirical research utilised a placement-definition of inclusion, whereas articles representing a normative and/or an argumentative position, used more encompassing definitions of inclusion. Amor et al. (2018) reported similar conclusions in a review of over 2300 articles.

Theorists have also argued that the idea of inclusion is contradictory to societal discourses promoting market values and an individualised view of society (Skrtic 2009; Slee 2011). One of the primary arguments for the introduction of school choice in the Swedish education system was that choice would lead to an increased variety of schools, which would be incentivised to profile themselves for specific pupil groups or preferences (Daun 2003). Within that rationale, an increased segregation in terms of pupil properties is not necessarily viewed as negative as it is in line with the ambition to fulfil the preferences of individual pupils (Magnússon 2015; Tah 2018). Thus, the question of inclusion would be secondary to individual choice and to pupil attainment as a measurement of quality. Conversely, if education should prioritise inclusion and social cohesion, the mixing of pupils of different backgrounds and abilities is both an end in itself, and means to create an inclusive and cohesive society for the future (e.g. Haug 1998; Skrtic 1991; Slee 2011; UNESCO 1994). From that perspective, increased stratification within the school system is negative.

### School choice in the Swedish education system

The Swedish education system encompasses preschool (ages 1–5 years) through primary school (6–16 years), to upper-secondary school (16–19 years), and adult education. Education is publicly funded and free of charge. The education reforms that introduced school choice in Sweden followed international patterns, emphasising that market competition would lead to higher attainment, more client-focus, a plurality of actors, innovative pedagogical approaches, and efficient use of resources (Daun 2003; Lundahl 2005). The Swedish education system is now characterised by marketisation and education politics often present binary images with a distinction between independent schools, run by private actors, and schools owned and run by municipalities. This polarised image has been problematised as the differences within the groups are much larger than between them (e.g. Magnússon 2015), and because schools compete with each other for pupils, no matter the ownership.

From a policy perspective, independent schools are equivalent to municipal schools; they adhere to the same legislation and curricula as municipal schools, with some exceptions, and must fulfil the same goals and maintain the same quality of education as municipal schools (SFS 2010:800). The municipalities finance pupils' education from preschool through upper-secondary school, via vouchers, i.e. a set sum that covers expenses for the pupil's education at his/her school of choice. Schools are not allowed to charge any additional tuitions or fees. Thus, in theory, pupils are able to choose between several municipal and

independent schools, although the supply of independent schools varies greatly regionally. Also, catchment areas are applied in most municipalities, which constricts access for pupils from other catchment areas to some degree. Independent schools are obliged to accept all pupils, but profiling (e.g. particular school subjects) may narrow the focus-group to whom the schools market themselves. Additionally, organisational and economic arguments can be used to refuse admittance to pupils with special needs. The number of independent schools has increased over the years. For instance, between 2005 and 2009, the increase of independent primary school owners was 23%, despite a decreasing pupil population (SNAE 2012), meaning more schools were competing for fewer pupils. Most owners of independent schools own one school, but the greatest increase has been among publicly traded companies that own several schools (SNAE 2014a). The idea of school choice leading to a diversity of smaller schools, owned by cooperatives of parents and/or teachers, is therefore increasingly inaccurate.

According to official statistics, approximately 15% of primary school pupils and 25% of upper-secondary school pupils attend independent schools (SNAE 2018a) albeit with large regional variations. On average, independent schools have marginally higher attainment than municipal schools (SNAE 2013). However, the difference has been attributed partly to socio-economic background-factors and social selection (Myrberg and Rosén 2006) and grade inflation (Tyrefors Hinnerich and Vlachos 2016).

There are public and political concerns regarding several aspects of independent schools. Changes in the education-market are rapid and frequent. Schools being sold, bankruptcies of owner-companies, and establishment of new companies make the market difficult to survey (Lundahl et al. 2013). Also, owners of independent schools can extract economic surplus from the public funds provided to them, making welfare-profits one of the prominent issues in political debates regarding education (Dahlstedt and Fejes 2018).

### *Equity and segregation*

The correlation between the rise of school choice in Sweden and decreasing equity and increased social segregation within the education system is well established (e.g. Andersson, Malmberg, and Östh 2012; Böhlmark and Holmlund 2011; Fjellman 2019; Trumberg 2011; Östh, Andersson, and Malmberg 2013; Bunar 2010). Schools and catchment areas are increasingly segregated both in terms of ethnicity and social background (Andersson, Malmberg, and Östh 2012; Bunar 2010; Bunar and Ambrose 2018; Fjellman 2019; Kallstenius 2010; Trumberg 2011). Official statistics also indicate that children of parents with higher education are overrepresented in independent schools and that segregation has increased between schools in terms of pupil attainment (SNAE 2014a).

Decreased equity has been connected to falling attainment on system level (e.g. Böhlmark and Holmlund 2011; Fjellman 2019), something discussed as a matter of concern in several recent OECD-reports (Cerna et al. 2019; OECD 2015, 2017). This relates to special education, as attainment is central to the definition of the need for special educational support in Sweden. Similar to international patterns, pupils with lower socio-economic background and with migrant-backgrounds are overrepresented among SEN-pupils in Sweden (Giota and Lundborg 2007; Berhanu 2008; Dyson and

Berhanu 2012-2073; Cook and Kiru 2018), groups that exercise choice to a lower degree (Bunar 2010; Daun 2003). Pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds are thus likely to experience different choice situations and to experience different outcomes from their choices (Vamstad 2014).

### *Special education and inclusion in Sweden*

The concept of 'pupils in need of special support' is central as regards the provision of special education in the Swedish education system (SFS 2010:800). The formulation of the concept emphasises the preposition '*in need*' rather than '*with need*', shifting focus from the individual pupil's attributes as the primary reason for the need of special support, to seeking explanations in the physical, social and organisational environment. While the legislation emphasises attainment of knowledge-goals as the primary indicator of a need for special support, 'other reasons' are also mentioned, e.g. behavioural and social difficulties. Hence, the notion of SEN-pupils encompasses a broader array of pupils in Sweden than in many other countries, encompassing pupils with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, and pupils encountering difficulties reaching the knowledge-goals of the curricula for other reasons. Head-teachers are legally accountable for ensuring that investigations take place and that documentation and planning for interventions are formed and followed (SFS 2010:800 § 3, 5, 7–12) and therefore to define and interpret what support is to be provided, to whom, and how (Göransson, Nilholm and Karlsson 2011). Since 2014, the legislation makes a distinction between 'extra support' made within the scope of regular teaching, and 'special support' being provided after an investigation of the pupil's need. Most of the studies summarised here, either collected data prior to the full enactment of this distinction or do not use it.

In light of this broad and unspecific definition of who is eligible for special support and its organisation, a large number of Swedish pupils are defined as being in need of special support (Giota and Emanuelsson 2011). Giota and Lundborg (2007) estimated that approximately 40% of pupils receive special support at some time during their compulsory school education and that approximately 20% of compulsory school pupils are seen as needing support at any specific time (Giota and Lundborg 2007). Recent numbers show that over 5% of pupils have individual intervention plans documenting the provision of special support, representing a dip from 13% in 2012, the year that the obligation to document interventions was removed (SNAE 2018b).

Inclusive education is not mentioned in the Swedish legislation (Göransson et al., 2011; Isaksson and Lindqvist 2015) but the legislation stipulates that special educational support should primarily be provided in the 'regular' classroom if possible. If segregating measures are deemed necessary, they should be temporary and restricted to particular school subjects. Aside negative social consequences of being assigned to a 'special' group, segregated solutions tend to become permanent rather than temporary, and pupils assigned to them rarely reach the goals intended at the same time or level as their peers (Emanuelsson and Persson 2002; Giota and Lundborg 2007). Recent official statistics show that roughly 1% of pupils are educated in segregated groups within their schools and that the proportion grows

exponentially over age groups, with approximately 3% of the oldest primary school pupils receiving segregated support (SNAE 2018b). Large-scale research also indicates that school difficulties are often explained in terms of properties of the individual pupils, rather than in terms of organisational factors (Magnússon 2015; Giota and Emanuelsson 2011; Giota and Lundborg 2007; Nilholm et al. 2007). Prior research has established that there are differences in how different professions define and explain the need for special support. Special needs educators (SNEs) are trained to work with school development towards inclusive education and are seen as important resources for schools regarding provision of special support and prevention of the need of special support arising. The SNEs tend to have a relational understanding of special needs, focusing more on the organisation and teaching, whereas other professions tend to explain problems with the attributes of the individual pupils (Göransson et al. 2018; Lindqvist et al. 2011; Lindqvist, Nilholm, and Almqvist 2013; Magnússon and Göransson 2018; Nilholm et al. 2013).

The Swedish education system is often recognised as being inclusive in an international comparison (e.g. EADSNE (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education) 2003; OECD 2011), but as indicated above there are reasons to critically examine that image. As Magnússon, Göransson, and Lindqvist (2019) argue, one reason may be that inclusion one educational policy ideal among others and must be viewed in the general context of education policy and political prioritisations.

## Methodological considerations

The articles summarised here were gathered through searches in ERIC, the Swedish national research-database SwePub, and in Pro-Quest. The topical relevance was the primary step of inclusion in the summary, i.e. that the publications in question should regard Sweden, independent schools and/or school choice, and special education and/or inclusive education. Several search-terms were used in both Swedish and English, for instance *"inclusive education"* and/or *"special education"* and *'school choice'* and items regarding Sweden chosen. The references of each of the publications were also studied in order to find additional publications of potential interest, yielding some further results. While peer-reviewed publications and doctoral-theses were of primary interest, two government reports were included as well, partly due to the scarcity of available research, and partly because they provide important statistics from government registries. Several articles were found that were of peripheral interest, e.g. about the historical development of the education system, theoretical and/or positioning articles, and articles about equity and/or broader notions of inclusion. While such studies are interesting, the aim of this article was to summarise empirical studies regarding the provision and organisation of special educational measures and the development of inclusion as regards special education. Hence, an exclusion was conducted where the included publications had to fulfil all the following criteria:

- (i) they must report empirical results,
- (ii) regarding special education and/or inclusive education,
- (iii) where independent schools and/or school choice are studied.



All studies that fulfilled these criteria were included, aside one small-scale, non-reviewed, research-report due to its age and limitations. The publications were then categorised into 'Official reports', 'Studies mapping the field', and 'Case studies', see [Table 1](#) for further detail.

The category 'Official reports' contains official statistics and surveys conducted by researchers for the Swedish National Agency of Education. 'Studies mapping the field' are constituted by a research report (Giota and Emanuelsson 2011), two doctoral theses (Magnússon 2015; Ramberg 2015), and several peer reviewed articles. Giota and Emanuelsson (2011) used registry data from a longitudinal research project, along with a survey of a representative sample of both municipal and independent schools. The works of Ramberg (2013, 2014, 2015) were total-population studies of upper-secondary schools, utilising both surveys and government registry-data. The publications by Magnússon (2015, 2016) Magnússon and Göransson (2018), Magnússon, Göransson, and Nilholm (2014, 2017) and Göransson, Magnússon, and Nilholm (2012) all reported results from a total-population survey of independent schools on a primary school level. Magnússon (2015) and Magnússon and Göransson (2018) also reported results from total-population surveys of Swedish special education teachers. Finally, Tah (2018) used official government registry-data.

The category 'Case studies', includes studies of smaller scope. Göransson, Malmqvist, and Nilholm (2013) studied eight schools with in-depth interviews and Gustafson and Hjörne (2015) was a comprehensive case-study of one school.

## Summary of research

The quantity and quality of the empirical material presented in the selected publications varies. However, they illustrate the important consequences of the Swedish education market for inclusive education. The summary below is organised thematically under three headlines: 'Organisational conceptualisations', 'Differences between schools', and 'Resources and competence'.

### *Organisational conceptualisation of special education and inclusive education*

A government report in the early 2000s (SNAE [The Swedish National Agency for Education] 2003) concluded that independent schools were more satisfied (than municipal schools) with their organisation of special education, with the resources

**Table 1.** List of studies.

Official reports	Studies mapping the field	Case studies
SNAE 2003, SNAE 2014b,	Giota and Emanuelsson 2011 Göransson, Magnússon, and Nilholm 2012 Magnússon 2015 Magnússon 2016 Magnússon and Göransson 2018 Magnússon, Göransson, and Nilholm 2014 Magnússon, Göransson, and Nilholm 2017 Ramberg 2013 Ramberg 2014 Ramberg 2015 Tah 2018	Göransson, Malmqvist, and Nilholm 2013 Gustafson and Hjörne 2015



allocated for special support, and that independent schools had higher goal attainment. The report also described the independent schools as innovative as regards the organisation of special education. Since the report's publication, the Swedish education market and the overall composition of independent schools' ownership has changed dramatically. At the time of publication, 5% of the total pupil population attended independent schools, most of which were owned by ideal organisations. Today, publicly traded companies own increasing proportions of the independent schools and 15% of primary school pupils attend independent schools (SNAE 2018a).

Comparisons of municipal and independent primary schools indicate that the proportion of SEN-pupils was lower in independent schools than in municipal schools and that independent schools used segregated ability grouping to a higher degree (Giota and Emanuelsson 2011; Göransson, Magnússon, and Nilholm 2012). However, Ramberg (2014) demonstrated that ability-grouping on the upper-secondary level has more to do with overall attainment than the ownership of the school. Schools with low attainment and high proportions of SEN-pupils used ability grouping to a much higher degree. This indicates a clustering of both SEN-pupils and resources at particular schools. A study of eight independent schools by Göransson, Malmqvist, and Nilholm (2013) concluded that local school-ideologies influences inclusive values, which in turn influences the organisation of special support provision. In other words, different educational (and political) ideologies have consequences for how schools organise their work with special educational needs. This indicates that further analysis of the local school context as regards the construction of inclusion and the organisation of special education are needed. One such study, of a single independent school described as working successfully with inclusion (Gustafson and Hjörne 2015), drew the conclusion that the school's small size and the proximity between teachers and pupils was a contributing factor to the school's success. However, the staff saw both the school's size and this proximity as threatened by increased demands for cost-efficiency and growth.

A total-population study of Swedish independent primary schools concluded that the independent schools posed few challenges to the traditional conceptualisation of special education (Göransson, Magnússon, and Nilholm 2012). The proportion of SEN-pupils was estimated as lower than in municipal schools, but great differences were visible within the population, proportions varying from none of the pupils to all of them needing support. Fifteen per cent of the independent schools had refused admittance to pupils because the pupils' problems would cause the school economic or organisational difficulties. Schools that profile themselves specifically for SEN-pupils constituted 11% of the independent school population. These schools have been becoming more common and have received increased legitimacy through parental choice (SNAE 2014b; Tah 2018) and many of these schools claim to take care of pupils whom 'the regular school' has failed (Magnússon 2016). This is an indicator of increased segregation on system level (Giota and Emanuelsson 2011; Magnússon 2015; Tah 2018). The Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE 2014b) has expressed concerns about the consequences of this for the goal of inclusive education on a system level, especially because there has been an increase in the provision of segregated forms of special support (Giota and Lundborg 2007; Ramberg 2014), particularly in the larger cities. An additional risk is that

special educational competence may become concentrated at these schools and that other schools may either not be able to attain and develop such competence or may choose not to do so as they can refer pupils to these 'special schools' instead (SNAE 2014b; Magnússon 2015).

### *Differences between groups of schools*

Magnússon, Göransson, and Nilholm (2014) analysed differences between different types of independent schools, based upon school profiles (e.g. pedagogy, religious, or subject matter) and the economic organisation of their ownership (i.e. publicly traded companies vs. ideal organisations). The results illustrated wide differences in the population of independent schools, in various important aspects. For instance, there is considerable variation in the proportions of SEN-pupils at different types of schools. Excluding the schools specifically marketed towards SEN-pupils (100% SEN-pupils), the highest average proportion of SEN-pupils (21%) was in a group with Waldorf-pedagogy profiles, whereas the lowest mean proportion (12%) was among schools with a particular school subject as profiles. The Waldorf-schools also had the highest occurrence of refusals of admittance (40%). This may be due to that Waldorf schools' small size and specific pedagogy being viewed as good for SEN-pupils, leading to difficulties accommodating them (c.f. Magnússon 2016). Much fewer schools belonging to publicly traded companies (with lower proportions of pupils with the need of support) had refused pupils admittance.

Traditional segregating methods and explanations of school problems (i.e. pupil attributes) were common among all types of independent schools (Magnússon, Göransson, and Nilholm 2014) leading to the conclusion that traditional special education had not been challenged with market competition (Magnússon 2015). While Göransson et al. (2012) showed that the proportion of independent schools profiled towards SEN-pupils was larger than what was previously documented (11%), Tah (2018) illustrated a tremendous increase of special schools for pupils with mild developmental disabilities owned by both independent actors and municipalities. Tah related this increase on the 'supplying' end to demographic statistics and concluded that despite the dramatic increase of special schools, the results did not indicate increased exclusion in relative terms because the increased 'supply' of such schools follows increases on the 'demand side' (i.e. demographic increases). However, Tah concluded that if the supply of special schools would be less limited, it would *'inevitably lead to increasing exclusion'* (Tah 2018, 12).

An in-depth analysis of free-text responses provided in a total-population survey of independent schools (Magnússon 2016), illustrated that the independent schools have very different problems to deal with and constitute a varied field, difficult to encompass in generalisations or categories. For instance, large school size can simplify the pairing of specific competences with specific problems in larger organisations that often have more resources and possibilities to dispatch them effectively. On the other hand, small school size can make professional collaboration, pupil participation, and adaptation to individual needs easier. Conversely, small schools might lack resources to pay for SNEs, and larger organisations may have stronger demands for profits (and hence efficiency) from their owners (Magnússon 2016). This particular study also illustrated the complexity of funding-organisation for special support

and concluded that many problems regarding special support in independent schools stem from obscure regulations and demands from the municipalities.

### *Resources and competence*

Several of the studies show that resources are an important issue as regards special support. For instance, in a comparative study, head-teachers in independent school claimed that the overall competence at their school was insufficient to a higher degree than head-teachers in municipal schools and approximately 25% of head-teachers in independent schools claimed that funding for special support was insufficient (Giota and Emanuelsson 2011). Another study showed that 38% of the independent schools claimed the resources they received for special support, were smaller than what the municipal schools received (Göransson, Magnússon, and Nilholm 2012).

As mentioned above, special needs educators (SNEs) are considered important professions when it comes to organising special education and developing inclusive education. However, primary- and secondary-independent schools employ SNEs to a much lower degree than schools run by municipalities (Magnússon 2015; Magnússon, Göransson, and Nilholm 2017; Ramberg 2013, 2015). Only 50% of SNEs working in independent primary schools have full-time positions as SNEs, compared to 80% of SNEs in municipal schools. SNEs working in independent schools also have other professional-roles more often than SNEs in municipal schools; for instance as head-teachers or regular teachers (Magnússon, Göransson, and Nilholm 2017). Ramberg (2013, 2015) concluded that there are great differences between municipal and independent upper-secondary schools as regards the availability and presence of SNEs and that many independent schools do not provide such resources. Magnússon (2015) drew a similar conclusion about independent primary schools. This is a speaking illustration of unequal access to special educational resources in different types of schools, and as these professions are intended to develop inclusive organisations, these disparities are worrying.

### *Conclusions and discussion*

The aim of this article is to illustrate the consequences of school choice for the conception of inclusion as related to special educational needs, using the Swedish education system as a case. The Swedish results indicate that the increased segregation in the education system (e.g. Bunar and Ambrose 2018; Böhlmark and Holmlund 2011; Fjellman 2019; Trumberg 2011; Östh, Andersson, and Malmberg 2013) also regards SEN-pupils on several levels, for instance, clustering of SEN-pupils at particular schools, fewer SEN-pupils at schools run by private actors, and a growth of privately run special schools. While there are examples of variations as regards the organisation of special education and inclusion among independent schools, the introduction of school choice and independent schools has not led to the innovation on the system level that was hoped for, as regards special education. There are several indicators that school choice in Sweden, contributes to societal and educational segregation, leading to increased homogeneity of pupils at certain schools, and that choices are limited for pupils needing special support.

As mentioned earlier, pupils needing special educational support are not isolated from – but rather intersect with – several different social groups (Dyson and Berhanu

2012, 2070-2073; Cook and Kiru 2018), some of which are disadvantaged and marginalised and less likely to exercise school choice, a factor further contributing to school segregation (Bunar 2010; Daun 2003). Thus, the segregating influence of school choice as regards SEN-pupils operates on at least four levels. First, it regards an increase in segregating organisational provision of support via the market revival of 'special schools'. Second, there are potential limitations of SEN-pupils' choice of schools, due to the denial of enrolment with reference to economic or organisational complications, and due to school-profiling that pre-emptively excludes pupils. Third, traditional methods and explanations of school problems as being due to pupils' attributes are common among all types of schools. Finally, SEN-pupils often belong to other marginalised social groups that tend not to exercise school choice. These consequences are dire for an education system that emphasises equity and is renowned for its inclusiveness.

Traditional special education can also be seen as revived as a consequence of market reforms that emphasise individual choice, attainment and efficiency. In a system that prioritises choice and efficiency and where responsibility for children's education is privatised to families, market-demands legitimise the supply of segregating organisational measures. Independent schools also provide professional resources for special support to a much lower degree than municipal schools. This is problematic as regards equity; pupils needing special educational support have a legal right to receive it, and by not providing it or providing it sparsely, schools indirectly dissuade these pupil groups. Finally, this article illustrates some of the intrinsic tensions of inclusive education (who is in focus, and where should they be educated) from a system-level perspective. Relating back to the four-level model of inclusion presented above (Göransson and Nilholm 2014), the idea of inclusion in the marketised Swedish education system seems to be devolving outside the model's scope, placement and support being increasingly a matter of economic efficiency and the creation of communities a matter of school profiling in the market. That choice has led to increased segregation in general, and for these pupils in particular, is a problem to which few politicians have suggested solutions. Countries seeking inspiration from the Swedish education system should be particularly cognisant of these consequences.

The results presented here, indicate a need for political discussions regarding the objectives of school choice within the education market and the increased segregation on both societal and school levels as consequences thereof. At the very least, policy-makers need to clarify their intentions for inclusive values and provide organisational prerequisites to achieve them. The results indicate a need for further research of choice mechanisms in the Swedish education system for both SEN-pupils and other social groups. Finally, further comparative analyses of educational policy as regards special support and education reform are necessary to understand the consequences of political ideologies in different contexts.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## ORCID

Gunnlaugur Magnússon  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5079-9581>

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