

DENMARK

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ASSESSMENT WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN DENMARK

This profile describes the methods used for assessing pupils in Danish Schools. The Danish school system is rooted in traditions going back almost 200 years. The per pupil expenditure is the highest of any country at the level of primary education and at the lower secondary level is only exceeded by three countries. Public satisfaction with the system has generally been high, but international comparisons have shown disappointing results. This may be a result of complacency and possibly, also of a weak evaluation culture in a country without a national curriculum, without grades before Year eight, and without national tests of proficiency before the end of Year nine. However, there are changes underway in terms of strengthening the evaluation culture.

1. Denmark


































































































Denmark is a Nordic country situated in north-western Europe. Denmark has been a kingdom since 900 AD and today it remains a constitutional monarchy covering 43,084 square kilometres and a population of 5,368,354 (2002). The average population density is 125 inhabitants per square kilometre. Denmark consists of one peninsula, Jutland, six large islands and 400 small islands. The capital, Copenhagen, is situated on one of the large islands, Zealand. Denmark has 7,314 kilometres of coastline and the islands are linked by a comprehensive network of bridges and ferry lines. Around 65% of the land is agricultural, while 11% is woodland. Oil and gas are Denmark's only natural resources and therefore practically all raw materials must be imported. Agricultural products account for about 50% of exports and industrial products for the remaining 50%.

Until January 2007 the country is divided into 14 counties (*Amter*), which in most cases also form municipality clusters. The counties are responsible for, among other things, regular health care, medical attendance, upper secondary schools (*Gymnasier*) and special educational support for children whose development calls for special, extensive consideration and support. There are 269 municipalities (*Kommuner*) in total. They are responsible for pre-school institutions, primary and lower secondary schools, including special education and other special educational assistance for children and young people less than 18 years of age.

As from January 2007 a large scale reform will "recreate" the map of Denmark. 98 new municipalities and five new regions will provide services for the citizens.

As in the social sector before the local government reform, counties and municipalities share the responsibility for special education. After the reform this task will belong to the municipalities exclusively. This means that municipalities from as 2007 will be responsible for all kinds of special education and special pedagogical assistance for small children as part of their responsibility for schools and for special education of adults (except dyslexic adults where the responsibility will be transferred to the state and provided by adult education centres (VUC)).

Municipalities and regions will be co-operating to ensure the capacity and development of the regional institutions of special education. Their co-operation involves a yearly framework agreement between the municipalities in the region and the region in which the places and offers, that the regional council makes available to the municipalities, is stipulated. Prices for the places and offers at the regional institutions with special education will also be set in the framework agreement. The agreement should be



supplemented by estimates of the need for regional services in the budgets for the next three years.

This outline describes which authorities will be responsible for which tasks after January 2007:

Municipalities:

- Primary school, including special education and special education for adults

Regions:

- Operation of the most specialised national and regional education
- Operation of educational institutions with special education for people with a speech, hearing or sight impairment (communication centres)
- Co-ordinating function regarding the education of youths and adult education, including FVU and education for dyslexics.

State:


- Establishment of goals for the contents of primary school education, including special education
- Centre for teaching aids and materials
- Education of youths
- Further education, adult education
- Short and medium-term higher education
- University education
- Research

In connection with the local government reform, a national knowledge and special counselling organisation (VISO) will be established. VISO will cover both social services and special education. The aim is to ensure a coherent and holistic collection and development of knowledge to be able to provide special counselling of citizens, municipalities, institutions, etc. and to create a complete view of all special counselling available in the country. Their offer will concern only the most severe and problematic cases.

2. The Danish Education System

Since 1993 the Act on the *Folkeskole* covers a comprehensive education system for children from kindergarten class to Year 9 with an optional Year 10 for students wanting to stay in lower secondary school for one more year. The *Folkeskole* includes all groups of disabled children including 2.1% in special schools and special classes. The pre-school age is covered by the Ministry for Family and Consumer Affairs.

The first Danish Act on the *Folkeskole* was introduced in 1814. Compulsory education was set to 7 years, and this remained unchanged until the end of the 1960's when the number of years was raised first to 8 and then in 1972 to 9 years. Until 1958 pupils were divided starting in grade 5 into two parallel streams of classes with different curricula. One was for children who were found able to continue for examinations after Year 9 and 10, leading to upper secondary schools or white collar jobs in public or private sectors. The other was for children who were destined for skilled or unskilled blue collar jobs - for these children no formal examinations were available. The division between the streams was made on the basis of an exam at the end of Year 5. From 1958 to 1975, division into the two directions was allowed to be postponed until after Year 7.



In 1901, the proportion of pupils continuing for examination after Year 10 was 2.9%. In 1950 it was 14.8%, in 1960 25%, in 1970 32.9% and in 1975 40.1% - an increase reflecting the rising demand for pupils continuing to a higher level in the education system. From 1975 onwards the *Folkeskole* has been a comprehensive school. It is an important fact that Denmark up to 2003 had no fixed curriculum or syllabi with detailed schedules for different grades and subjects.

However, from 2003 compulsory goals have been set up for each subject for every consecutive two year period, but between these periods each teacher is allowed to make up his or her own curriculum and syllabus. In practice, however, planning is guided by the textbooks used. Repetition of a year is not used as a regular practice of differentiation. Parallel classes at the same year level are formed to cover the same heterogeneous span of pupil differences. In other words, pupil differentiation is not used, and the act on the *Folkeskole* has a specific paragraph underlining the obligation of differentiation of teaching content and methods in each class. Alternative grouping of pupils is recommended to be used on a non-permanent and temporary basis to enhance differentiation.


Detailed information about the Danish school system can be found on <http://eng.uvm.dk/>

3. The Legal Systems for Assessment

3.1 General Educational Assessment

Even before the start of the *Folkeskole* in 1814 assessment was a part of the existing schools. This was done by the Bishop who visited the schools on a regular basis to assess the performance of the pupils, the teachers and the teaching materials as well as the buildings. This system was continued until 1814 when the state/municipalities assumed responsibility for the schools. *Gymnasier* with upper secondary education training were started in 1903, and these schools were under state administration until 1980, when they were transferred to the counties

It should be noted, that Denmark up to 2003 has not had a national curriculum with detailed schedules for different grades and subjects for any level of education. In fact, it has traditionally been a strongly held belief that the absence of a national curriculum improves the quality of education, as qualified teachers 'own' their curricula and syllabi. The legislation enshrines a system which gives responsibility to the municipalities, the schools and the teachers. The latest act of 2003 says: 'The municipal council shall lay down the targets and frameworks for the activities of the schools. The municipal council shall supervise the activities of the schools'. However, the act of 2003 also reinforces the legal basis for the Minister of Education to oversee the system and to: "lay down general rules regarding measures to further good order in the schools' and to 'request any information that he/she deems necessary for the performance of these tasks from the municipal council and the county council". Further, from 2007, 10 national tests covering a wide range of subject and grades will be gradually introduced together with national proficiency standards for the tests. These tests will be supplemented by a 'toolbox' with teachers guides for use of test results and supplementary assessment materials for teachers' daily use. Municipalities shall further submit an annual quality report, and a national committee for supervision of quality in the *Folkeskole* will oversee test results, quality reports and will have the possibility to make spot-checks in municipalities and publish examples of good practice.



Assessment of individual children was made in the form of verbal statements until 1850, when the Danish scientist H.C. Ørsted (who discovered electromagnetism in 1820) invented a six-step marking scale with numerical values going from 7 to minus 23 in progressively increasing numerical differences towards the lower end. The scale values were: 8, 7, 5, 1, -7, -23. The mark 5 was set as the average value. The argumentation behind the increments towards the lower end was that lower marks should imply a punishment when the average was calculated. The Ørsted scale was used in the *Folkeskole* and the *Gymnasium* (primary and secondary education), while institutions of higher education maintained different marking systems. The scale was changed in 1871 to give a higher degree of differentiation by adding two mark values between each of the six existing steps resulting in a 16-step scale. Thus the above average values were 8, $7\frac{1}{3}$, $7\frac{1}{3}$, $6\frac{1}{3}$, $5\frac{2}{3}$, 5.

The industrialization of the Danish society meant a rising demand for young people with at first lower secondary and later, upper secondary education and thereby higher achievement in the *Folkeskole*, and gradually the average of the grades started to rise. Thus the grades at the lower end of the scale were almost never used. In addition, in the first part of the 1900's the use of negative mark values was criticised. Therefore in 1943 the Ørsted scale was changed by deleting two marks at the lower end of the scale, which had been added in 1871 and were never used, and by adding 7 to the numerical values for the total scale, which then went from 15 to minus 16 with an intended average of 12. However, the average grade kept rising to reach almost 14 in 1960, leaving only three grades above average, resulting in teachers' daily practice of using small and large 'arrows' up and down between the official marks.

The need for a new scale was obvious, and in 1963 a new ten-point scale called the '13-scale' after the highest mark was introduced. Average is defined as 8 with numeral intervals of 1 to both sides except for the high and the low end, where increments of 2 are used to stimulate pupils to strive for the highest grade and to avoid the low grade end. After the *Folkeskole* Act of 1975 grades are only given when the pupils reach lower secondary school in Year eight. At the primary level, assessments are given in the form of written statements two times a year.

The 1970's saw a fierce debate about the grading scales, in which progressive teachers and the political left wing argued for either the abolishment of grading or the use of internal assessment with verbal feedback only, or for the use of criterion-referenced or even objective-referenced grading scales. A committee was established, which finally, in 1976, proposed a four-step criterion-referenced scale (from A to D) with an added sixth step (0) for pupils achieving beyond the expected criterion. Letters were used to make the calculation of an average impossible. The proposal was, however, rejected by the Parliament, and the '13-scale' has been in use up to 2007.

The '13-scale' has been considered a success as it was generally recognised as well defined and because the average has never slipped towards the good end. However, a committee was established by the Ministry of Education in 2003 to evaluate the '13-scale' and to consider alternatives with special reference to the systems used within the EU countries (ECTS). The result has been that a new scale, called the '12-scale' linked to the ECTS-scale is established for use from 2007.

3.2 Curriculum based examinations and assessments and regulations covering public examinations


The *Folkeskole* does not end with an exam as such, and the pupils have until 1997 been free to choose whether they want to be examined or not. However almost all pupils, 95% in 2003 (UNI-C, 2004), took exams and the grades are noted in their certificates. From 2007 all pupils have to be examined with exception of pupils with severe special educational needs. No average is calculated and entrance to upper secondary schools is based on the wish of the students and their parents, supplemented by a statement of competence from the teachers. Written exams are developed by officers responsible for different subjects in the Ministry of Education. However, from 2002 the results from the school leaving exams are published as averages for schools.

Students in special needs settings will, as mentioned, in most cases choose not to take these final exams but will instead leave school with written verbal statements about their proficiencies. There are no statistics regarding reasons for not taking these final exams. There is an ongoing public debate saying that some school principals try to persuade students with special needs, not to take final exams.

At the institutional level, the quality of education has since 1958 been the responsibility of the school owners, i.e. the municipalities for the *Folkeskole* and the counties for the *Gymnasium*. However, the only formal assessments are done at the exams, when state authorized external examiners report on the general level to the school principals and send summary statements to the Ministry of Education, mainly reporting on the function of the centrally developed tests.

Until 2006 with the establishment of the committee for supervision of quality in the *Folkeskole*, there was no central inspectorate of education. However in 1999 the Danish Evaluation Institute was established to carry out systematic and mandatory evaluations of teaching and learning at all levels of the education system. The institute is now well established and has developed methodologies to suit the nature of its mission. Self-evaluations are very central elements in the evaluation procedures, while tests – until now – have been almost unused. The institute has carried out pilot evaluations of two school districts and has looked at the school leaving examination – the *Afgangsprøve* - the experience of the first three years of schooling, the international dimension in education, and English in the *Folkeskole*. In 2003, it completed an evaluation of teacher training. From 2007 the committee for supervision of quality in the *Folkeskole* will take over the responsibilities of the Danish Evaluation Institute regarding the *Folkeskole*.

There have been several initiatives to raise standards in the Danish education system. In 1987, the Ministry of Education established a 'Perspective Committee' with the task of making a survey of the basic knowledge and general values which the school should give Danish young people to prepare them for life in the 21st century. A report with a comprehensive catalogue of 'basic knowledge' was submitted in 1988. In 1991, the *Folkeskole* was included in the IEA study of reading and was found to perform well below the international average (Elley, 1994), a result which sent shock waves through the Danish education system. In 1997, the Danish Ministry of Education published a booklet called 'Quality which can be seen', in which the need for a closer monitoring of output and the decision about participation in PISA are mentioned. Also in 1998, a project entitled 'The *Folkeskole* in the year 2000' was started as a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Education, the National Association of Local Authorities and the Danish Teachers Union (Mehlbye, 2000). In 1999, the Danish Evaluation Institute was established, and Denmark is participating in the PISA cycles 2000, 2003 and 2006.



Results from PISA 2000 also showed disappointing results (OECD, 2001. Andersen et al., 2001) Denmark was no. 16 in reading, no. 12 in mathematics and no. 22 in science out of 32 participating countries. Moreover results showed that Denmark had less success in compensating for home background factors than other Nordic countries (Pilegaard et al., 2003), and had less success in integrating bilingual pupils (Egelund, 2003). There were, however, also positive results. School leaders, teachers and support staff are dedicated; pupils are confident and express a high degree of 'sense of belonging' and a good relationship with teachers.

The latest act from 2003 is the result of a development over the preceding six to eight years in which the central government established new powers in relation to the use of the specification of goals. There have always been goals for the final exam: *Realeksamen* after 10 years of *Folkeskole* until 1975 and the *Afgangsprøve* after 9 or 10 years of *Folkeskole* after 1975. In 1993, the Ministry of Education issued 'Central knowledge and proficiency areas' and booklets indicating possible content for each subject, but it was up to the school owners (municipalities, counties) to make more detailed plans, curricula and syllabi, which, however, seldom was done (Mehlbye, 2000). It was most common for teachers to follow textbook systems alone or in combination (Mehlbye, 2000).

Keeping in mind the fact that Danish teacher training for preschool, primary and lower secondary school is carried out in institutions that are below university level, as well as the fact that formal written assessment is a very uncommon activity (Egelund, 2002), it is understandable that the Ministry of Education has since 2003 issued guidelines for competences to be achieved in each subject in the *Folkeskole* for two-year intervals – a change which only marginally passed through Parliament as it was considered 'un-Danish'.


Moreover, from 2002, results from the *Afgangsprøve* after 9 years of *Folkeskole* have been published on the homepage of each school and on the Ministry of Education's website. In this way, the Danish education system is in a transition between an emphasis on 'inputs', such as resources per student, to 'outcomes', such as results from the final tests and examinations, the latter being instigated by an act dealing with the 'openness and transparency' of information and compulsory intermediate goals.

Finally from 2007 the national, adaptive tests, the national competence profiles, the teacher 'toolbox', and the committee for supervision of quality in the *Folkeskole* is the latest attempts to raise the output quality of the *Folkeskole*.

3.3 Initial and ongoing assessment of special educational needs

In cases where differentiated instruction, including different ability groups, which is allowed up to 50% of total time, is unable to meet a pupil's educational needs, then the pupil is provided with special needs education, if an educational psychological assessment performed by the Educational Psychological Service is confirming the need. The parents and the teachers both have the right to make a referral to the Educational Psychological Advisory Service (PPR). When special education is provided an individual educational plan is drawn up and assessment of the results from special education is expected to be done on a regular basis.

There is, however, no knowledge of to which degree this is done. Rules for provision of special needs education state that two guiding principles should be followed. One is about proximity – the special educational setting should be as close to the regular



classroom, the local school, the parents address, as possible. The other is about least segregating measure – the least segregated setting should be used.

Even though a sociological model of defining special needs is generally accepted, the medical-psychometric model of resource allocation is dominant in the regulations governing special needs services dated 15 December 2005.

Looking at policies, there are some contrasting tendencies in later Danish assessment policies and policies for inclusiveness. On one hand the school shall remain inclusive, on the other hand the use of educational setting has been introduced in 2003, and – at the same time targets are specified at two year intervals. One can fear that the introduction of specified targets and publication of results from final examinations will lead to more referrals to special needs education. Others argue that the specified targets and published exam results will help teachers and headmasters to know when extra differentiation is needed.

In any case not much is known about the effect of specialised teaching and learning strategies and methods, and nothing is known about the effect of the different forms of provision of special needs education. Legislation will be changed from 2007 where referral to resource rooms during normal school hours shall be avoided and instead provide special provision for children in regular classes which will be given before or after normal school hours or as team teaching in normal school hours. In the 2005 state budget 1 million EUR was given to The Danish University of Education for research into the effectiveness of special needs education settings in Denmark.

4. Implementation of Assessment Policy

As mentioned above - apart from the grading system and the final exams, we have not until 2006, where laws about national testing are expected to be passed, yet any common national assessment policies in Denmark. The disappointing results from PISA have spurred the debate, and it was strengthened by a review (OECD, 2004b) promoting better assessment strategies and earlier intervention for pupils with special educational needs.

In 2004, The Danish Evaluation Institute published a report about on-going (or formative) assessment, available from www.eva.dk, in Danish only, but the Evaluation Institute web site is also available in English. This report concludes, amongst others, that the on-going/formative assessment method is little known in Danish schools, and that the role of the class teacher is a focal point of criticism to be dealt with. This means that it is mainly the class teacher who decides whether or not on-going assessments are performed. The same conclusion is found in the “Good examples” report, which is described later on.

The debate is widespread and prevails in a lot of different media and on different levels. For example, we have debate programmes on radio and television about the inclusive school. Assessment is subject for political discussions and amongst school professionals in particular, where the development of an “assessment culture” is lively discussed. But there are no discussions about the possible correlation between inclusion and different assessment methods.

One of the main questions has been to find out whether we need a “test culture” or an “assessment culture”. Some perceive these cultures as two of the same kind; others prefer to distinguish between them.



5. Challenges and Tendencies

Denmark is – as most other countries – challenged with at the same time an increased formal assessment culture and an increased inclusive structure. These tendencies can be considered as conflicting, but there are several examples showing new and positive tendencies, which both promote useful assessment and inclusion.

Below are described, examples of assessment and inclusion. The first one deals with initiatives primarily for pupils who are very difficult to include in the Danish school system, namely those with a disturbing and inattentive behaviour. The other example describes the systematic work with new assessment methods within a mainstream school.

(Please refer to the Annex for an article by the Minister of Education regarding Danish 'evaluation culture').

ASSESSMENT PRACTICE IN DENMARK

1. Assessment in inclusive classrooms settings

The municipality of Copenhagen has initiated a range of measures to change a negative social heritage, in order to enhance inclusion. To change the negative social heritage means that the child is doing better than expected in the light of his or her socio-economic background, especially the parents' social, cultural, educational and financial background and resources. Studies show that in comparison to the other Nordic countries, we are not very good at changing the negative social heritage through education in Denmark. The negative social heritage means that only very few persons from socially vulnerable groups will obtain a degree at university level. Further information is available from the web site of the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs at www.sm.dk

Resources that are allocated for the purpose of changing the negative social heritage are primarily meant to be spent on children who have problems related to their behaviour, contact abilities and well-being. (The Ministry of Education has published a report about problems related to behaviour, contact abilities and well-being, available (in Danish) at www.uvm.dk in the "Publications" section. This includes children with attention-seeking problems (ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and children with contact problems (Asperger's syndrome – a disorder within the autism spectre), as these children are very difficult to include in the Folkeskole.


Each school within the municipality of Copenhagen is allocated a fixed sum ear-marked for initiating activities and therefore improving the possibilities of including pupils who have been segregated from mainstream school because of these problems.

2. Competence centres in Copenhagen

Copenhagen is the largest municipality in Denmark. As in the rest of the country, the number of children with Asperger's syndrome has also increased significantly. These children have normally been placed in special schools (as it is prescribed in section 2 of the Act on the Folkeskole), which is the most segregated type of school in Denmark. In 1989, Copenhagen had 20 pupils with Asperger's syndrome, but in 2002 there were already 97 pupils registered with Asperger's. 68 pupils with ADHD were registered in 1989 in Copenhagen, and in 2005 the figure is 74, plus approx. 30 pupils who have been diagnosed with ADHD, but who are able to manage in the Folkeskole with some support lessons. The municipality of Copenhagen has established two competence centres where teachers in the Folkeskole can seek advice and support for their daily work with children with Asperger's syndrome and ADHD. The centres are closely connected to the two special schools that exist in Copenhagen for these children. They have courses for teachers in the Folkeskole and these centres arrange for special teachers to visit teachers in mainstream schools in order to help them elaborate individual education plans (IEP's), or to develop new pedagogical methods and materials. The results so far show a wish to keep these children in mainstream settings and to improve capabilities in supporting their special educational needs.

The working procedures are as follows:

Support for inattentive children is initiated in co-operation between the class teacher, the local educational-psychological advisory service and teachers from the competence centre. The Act on the Folkeskole prescribes that permanent special education can be initiated only on the basis of an educational-psychological assessment and therefore all



municipalities in Denmark have a local Educational-Psychological Advisory Service Centre, called PPR. Support is normally initiated for an individual child with inattentive behaviour. A teacher from the competence centre will contact the class teacher (or team of teachers) and together they will elaborate a written contract that will define the measures to be taken, and when, where and how to take them. Furthermore, it is decided who will take care of the tasks and a time table will be set up. Follow-up and assessment measures will also be decided. Part of the work will be to observe the pupil, the teacher and the class. The observations will provide the basis for advice and guidance from the competence centre to the pupil's teachers. Assessment of these measures will take place in co-operation between the competence centre, the class teachers and the local school psychologist by comparing the goals in the contract, with what has been achieved in reality, to see if these goals have been reached. This method is similar to the formative assessment method, as educational changes are evaluated on the basis of pupils' assessments. Furthermore, the contractual measures are assessed on their effect in relation to:


- the individual child
- the options and conditions available for the teacher to teach the inattentive child
- the other children in class

Thus, assessment is based on what is written in the contract and on the class teacher's feed-back to the competence centre. There is no intention to control the work of the teacher, but only to support his or her further work with the inattentive child. For instance, follow-up measures could be agreed upon, such as new observations or further advice and guidance for educational measures to be taken in order to overcome inattentive behaviour. A baseline assessment will decide whether or not the child is to be referred to special support. For instance, the competence centre may have found some problems that have been hidden so far, e.g. troubles at home. Normally, contact between school and home is taken care of by the class teacher, but in a case where there are severe social difficulties at home, the social authorities will be contacted. The child could also suffer from organic difficulties that are very hard to overcome within a mainstream school environment. A traditional assessment method will be applied, in order to evaluate the results of the measures taken, compared to the goals set out in the contract. This will take place as an oral assessment, in the form of meetings between the teachers of the class and those of the competence centre. The competence centre works for inclusion, and so far teachers have stated that guidance and counselling from the centre have increased their possibilities to include inattentive children in their classroom. (The 2003/2004 evaluation report from the competence centre at Charlottegaarden School, the school in Copenhagen for children with ADHD is available (unfortunately only in Danish) at: www.netpublikationer.dk/kk/5873).

The competence centre receives an increasing number of inquiries from mainstream schools within the municipality of Copenhagen. This could indicate an efficient method to develop a more inclusive school; on the other hand it could also be a sign of an increased lack of knowledge of special education amongst Danish teachers. The tendencies are still too new to make any final conclusions.

3. Assessment in a mainstream school

In the municipality of Karlebo, a small municipality north of Copenhagen, is situated the Egedalsskolen (www.egedalsskolen.dk). For the past 5 years Egedalsskolen has worked systematically with assessment issues. The school has 415 pupils and 42 teachers



divided into 10 Year groups with 2 classes in each group, an average dispersion in Denmark.

Egedalsskolen has its own local competence centre to supervise the teams of teachers. Coordinators from the centre and the teacher team have 10 meetings per year where pupils from each of the classes are subject for discussion. Furthermore, the school management and the competence coordinator meet once a fortnight with the local school psychologist. Other relevant key persons may attend these meetings, e.g. a class teacher, a social worker or a leisure-time teacher (many Danish children attend leisure-time facilities for which a leisure-time teacher is employed to work with the children). The meetings primarily aim to coordinate the work, but they also have a preventive effect, i.e. they facilitate earlier intervention for children with special needs. A coordinator, who works as coordinator at the centre, states that “these on-going meetings have enhanced inclusion, so that the number of segregated children has fallen significantly”. Furthermore, Egedalsskolen has introduced screening of new children once a year to make sure the new 1st forms are composed in the best way possible. The screening takes place in co-operation with the leader of the 0 forms (earlier referred to as pre-school class, a transition class between kindergarten and school) and the competence centre coordinators. Focus is on the child’s academic potential and social competencies.

Egedalsskolen has introduced its own assessment methods, mainly in the form of interviews. These take place 4 times a year, where whole school days are dedicated to interviews between each individual pupil and his or her teachers. The first interview takes place in August, at the beginning of the school year, where individual goals for the year will be set. In November and March there are follow-up interviews to see whether these goals have been reached. The interview is set for approx. 15 minutes per pupil. Assessment interviews are performed in May.

Apart from this, there are 2 interviews between school and home during the school year. They take place in November and March, just after the follow-up interviews.

One of the teachers state that “The pupils are well-prepared for the interviews. Questionnaires are handed out to the pupils in advance, to be filled out in co-operation with the parents. The interviews are focused on the pupils’ academic skills, but social issues are also touched upon”. In the questionnaire the pupils describe their own role during the lessons and their expectations to the outcome. They will also use log books for the documentation of their work during the school year. The Headmaster states that “Teachers are very fond of the log book as a supplement to the questionnaires”.

The interviews are initiated already in the 0 Year in order to let the pupils have responsibility for their own learning right from the beginning.

An on-going assessment between teachers and the head teacher take place parallel with the teacher-pupil assessments. Thus, the head teacher will attend classes on a regular basis. His/her observations will be followed up by interviews between the head teacher and the teacher. “The head teacher always receives a lot of information, but it is very important to also obtain personal experience”, states the head teacher.

There have been no pupils segregated from Egedalsskolen during this school year (cf. subsection 2 of section 20 in the Act on the Folkeskole, laying down rules for the provision of special education and other special educational assistance for children in

need of this). According to the deputy manager of the school, this is due to the systematic methods of assessment and inclusion applied at all levels in the school.

4. Innovations and Developments

The following sections describe some examples of innovation and development of good educational assessment practice in the Danish Folkeskole. A presentation of a research project focusing on good school practice is followed by the description of a project of pupils' individual educational plans (IEP's), with specific focus on pupils with special needs in mainstream schools. The report is rounded up with a description of current assessment work and methods as practised in the Danish Folkeskole. Part of this work aims directly to increase the level of inclusion, another part takes a more indirect approach. There is at present no valid information to prove any direct cause and effect relationship between inclusion and the development of different assessment methods.


The Danish Ministry of Education's publication on inclusion ("Rummelighed – fra ide til handling"), available (in Danish) from <http://pub.uvm.dk/2003/rummelighed/helepubl.htm> presents a number of articles with different aspects of inclusive development in the Danish Folkeskole. One of these (Jakobsen, 2003) describes an assessment method that aims to increase inclusion, the so-called "self-assessment" method. The method is described in detail; however, there are no references as to how it is used in a specific school situation; and therefore it will not be described further in this report. The objectives of this progress report have been somewhat restrained, but we have no current Danish information that describes the positive and negative consequences of certain specific assessment methods with regard to the inclusion of pupils with special needs. Until 2000, research on special education was very limited in Denmark (Baltzer, 2005), and we still need research to illuminate positive and negative consequences of different assessment methods in the Danish school system in particular. The report is based on interviews with key persons who are involved in assessment procedures, and on information from publications about assessment and inclusion. Furthermore, several articles have been used as information sources.

A number of Danish municipalities have initiated their own projects to develop efficient assessment methods. Legislators as well as local politicians and municipal administrators seek to find methods to compare quality in different schools, e.g. on the basis of grade point averages. These initiatives are often made on the basis of a wish to develop new assessment methods that are more detailed than ordinary tests.

Below is presented a Danish research project to identify factors that characterise a school with high performance results.

5. "Good examples": A research project

In 2004 the Danish Ministry of Education conducted a study, "Good examples", which describes conditions in a number of Danish schools (Mehlbye, 2004). 400 Danish schools were contacted, and of these 200 were selected for the study. 100 of the selected schools are so-called high-performance schools, which means that they obtain better results than are expected on the basis of the pupils' socio-economic backgrounds. The other 100 are low-performance schools, thus they present lower results than expected from the pupils' socio-economic backgrounds. The results are measured on the basis of the grade point averages obtained at the end-of-term tests in Year 9, and these are compared with the socio-economic background of the pupils. As proved in the study, the



socio-economic background has a major effect on the pupil's performance level, in the Folkeskole as well as later on during higher education.

A questionnaire was sent out to the 200 schools. 146 returned complete answers and of these, 15 schools were selected for a qualitative analysis of the conditions in the individual school. 11 of the 15 schools were high-performance schools, and the remaining 4 were low-performance schools. The study shows that performance levels in the schools are under influence from some very complex and dynamic inter-action mechanisms between various factors. Below we have listed some of the prevailing characteristics of a high-performance school.

Management, including:

- clear management structures
- a visible management team
- the management team follows up quickly on decisions
- the management team supervises and guides the personnel
- the management team conducts an on-going dialogue with the personnel
- the management team ensures the developmental plan of the school is elaborated in close co-operation with the personnel

Organisation:

- activities are planned and well structured
- working procedures are clear
- future challenges, such as generational changes, are well planned for in advance
- the development of subject skills and the support for weak pupils are areas of high priority

Teacher teams:

- younger and older teachers work together in teams
- teachers use each other's qualifications for mutual professional sparring
- teachers prioritise their pupils' academic as well as social development

Pupils:


- pupils prioritise own learning and good assessment results

Mission statement:

- the mission statement of the school is well-known by everyone
- the mission statement is well integrated into the daily practice of the school
- all teachers know how to implement the mission statement in the daily work

Teaching:

- academically weak pupils are not excluded from joint academic activities
- detailed and thorough planning will promote continuity and order in the classroom
- teachers are flexible and stimulate the pupils' commitment
- group work will create commitment
- teachers are open towards communication and co-operation, which will enhance the pupils' commitment
- teachers will pay attention to the pupils' various cultural, personal and academic prerequisites
- teachers will acknowledge the children as people and not just pupils



The study shows big differences in assessment methods. Most often it is the teacher and not the school who determine the content, methods and scope of assessment. Many teachers elaborate their own materials for assessment. Typical assessment tools are log books and portfolios. A log book contains the pupil's own records of joint goals, class goals and individual personal goals. It is often used for comprehensive project descriptions (Johansen & Langager, 2002). The log book often contains questions for the pupil to answer, such as: What did you learn? How did you learn it? What was good and what was bad? Have you reached your goals? (ibid.).

The portfolio contains a systematic collection of the pupil's activities – in principle these are selected by the pupil themselves. A main thought behind this portfolio is to make the pupil develop his or her ability to reflect upon own learning and estimate own performance level in relation to certain personal and desirable goals as well as general goals (ibid.).

"Good examples" also analysed good classroom practice within 3 schools. The main conclusions of this show, that it is not possible to prove a direct link between certain methods of practice and the grade performance level, however, it is possible to show how different practice may enhance or limit the pupils' participation and learning. Furthermore, it is concluded that the availability of methods of practice to enhance pupils' academic competencies and learning motivation depend on the conditions and possibilities available at the individual school. These vary a lot amongst the participating schools. Furthermore, what is good practice in one class and for some pupils may not be good for other pupils or classes in other schools (Mehlbye, 2004).


The report is available in full from www.uvm.dk (on-line publications), but unfortunately only in Danish.

"Good examples" is a study with a broad empiric foundation. Furthermore, it is of current interest and it clarifies some important factors to be considered in relation to the creation of a high-performance and inclusive school. The study does not focus upon the needs of specific groups of pupils, neither on inclusion or assessment, but indirectly it touches upon all three aspects. Thus, an inclusive school that focuses upon assessment as more than just traditional and formal testing requires certain standards to be met with by the Danish school system. The study reveals these standards, but at the same time it is clear that the development of good school practices is a complex procedure determined by a variety of factors.

5.1 Who is involved in assessment?

The "Good examples" study and experiences from Egedalsskolen (mentioned above) show some important aspects in terms of assessment in school. The best results are obtained where all employees are involved, which means that it is a clear management task to ensure that everybody gets involved. Assessment is normally used as a basis for elaborating an in-company plan, which is common practice in the Danish school system.

Experience from the good assessment culture projects shows the importance of the school's management. The management is responsible for creating possibilities to develop an assessment culture, and the teacher and the teacher teams must exploit these possibilities the best way. The teacher plays an important role in the development of practice, thus it is not possible to point out specific schools with good or bad assessment practices. The teacher is still a key person in the development of new



assessment methods in Danish schools. Teacher teams are more and more often organised so that each team is composed of teachers from the same Year group and around the same class. Thus, teachers' work has been more collectively organised within the past few years, and this might imply that assessment and inclusion procedures have become less dependent on the individual teacher. An article by Nielsen (2005), the head of an Educational Psychological Advisory Service, underlines the necessity for schools to develop a more appropriate mixture of individual and collective orientations in order to maintain and further develop inclusion.

5.2 Assessment and development of educational practice

The coherence between assessment methods and development of educational practice has not been clearly defined. But schools with an assessment culture, i.e. schools with fixed procedures where everybody is involved, show a more clear cause and effect relationship, also proven in the "Good examples" project.

5.3 Innovative assessment tools and methods

Interviews between school and home are normally carried out once or twice a year, in order to discuss the pupil's general proficiency marks and development. It is a form of assessment practice, as a lot of information about the pupil's academic level will be revealed through these interviews. The interviews function as tools to evaluate the pupil's individual progress towards a goal (summative assessment) and to set up new developmental goals. They take place between the class teachers and the pupil. In many cases an individual education plan is elaborated upon the interview. This plan is written down and will constitute the basis for the next interview. Other innovative assessment tools are log books and portfolios, as mentioned earlier. A proposal to make IEP's for all pupils – not only pupils with special needs – was passed to the parliament in spring 2006 together with 10 national, adaptive tests and suggestions (a "tool box") for increased summative assessment.

It is clear that Denmark is in the initial stages of assessment implementation. Policies have been few but they have changed dramatically the last few years. However, resources and time allocation is very limited when it comes to municipalities and schools. There is no doubt that increased assessment will be time consuming for teachers, pupils and school principals, but it seems to be expected that increased effectiveness will provide the necessary time. The research has clearly shown that teachers' knowledge about assessment is inadequate, and today it is not included in the curriculum for initial teacher training. Moreover attitudes linked to assessment among teachers, pupils and parents are not always positive and many look upon the central initiatives as instruments of control rather than means of creating a better environment for learning.



THE FEATURES OF ASSESSMENT BEST PRACTICE AND POLICY THAT SUPPORTS BEST ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

Best practice

Best practice of assessment in inclusive classrooms will be formative assessment done in collaboration between teachers around the pupil, between teachers and pupil and between teachers, pupil and parents. This must be done using a multitude of methods, logbooks, portfolios, self assessments, observations, questionnaires and tests. Teachers must emphasise the use of written and other means of documentation to ensure the progressive nature of formative assessment.

The system must also ensure that information, including assessment material, from preschool services is used. All too often valuable information is lost in the transition from one system to another. The system must also ensure that good co-operation is established between pre-school teachers and teachers in primary schools in order to promote the transition between two educational cultures, where pre-school care with its focus on development is combined with primary school with more focus on academic skills.

Policy that supports best practice

An inclusive assessment policy must strengthen the need for formative assessment for all pupils – not only special needs pupils. An inclusive assessment policy must also detach allocation of resources from a traditional medical-psychometric assessment of individual children's deficiencies to the promotion of flexible organisation of teaching and learning environments. If extra resources are dependent on a diagnosis and referral to resource rooms, special classes or special schools, inclusion will not happen except from a few idealistic teachers. An inclusive assessment policy must also avoid publication of test and exam results – naming and shaming is not promoting inclusiveness. Comparison between schools can only be done using value added methods which take pupils' background and initial level into account.

Conclusions

The main change – or transition – in Denmark is now going from an input governed system with very limited assessment to an output governed system with widespread national, adaptive testing and publication of final exam results. The main reasons for change are the competitive demands of globalisation with focus on quality for invested money combined with the PISA results.

The change extends to the trend to make schools more inclusive. There will be good reasons for schools to try to segregate students with special needs to special schools as it will improve their average results from testing and final exams. Parents' free choice of schools may even worsen the tendencies.

The main challenge will be to strengthen the importance of formative assessment as the essential tool of quality assurance in all educational settings. A strengthened formative assessment can be the main component in assuring that all pupils, both those with special needs and those who are exceptionally gifted, to reach their potential level of academic and social development. Also factors mentioned in the "Good examples"



project, mission statement, management, organisation, team teaching, self assessment and teaching strategies must be emphasised as means of good school performance.

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Annex: Feature Article from “Politiken” (Danish Newspaper), 26 March 2006

Evaluation culture in the Danish Folkeskole

Danish children should be better prepared for the future. The Danish Government intends to introduce new action plans for an on-going evaluation of all pupils. Local authorities shall ensure work in schools is of high quality and a new committee shall monitor the development process in the educational sector. Management issues shall undergo a thorough examination as well.

By Bertel Haarder, Danish Minister of Education

At the end of every school year, approximately 10. 000 Danish pupils leave the Folkeskole with very poor reading skills, in average more than 3 pupils per class! They will therefore find it very hard to complete further education resulting in a proper job.


Many of these young people end up in this situation, because per tradition, school and educational issues have never been of great importance in their homes. The group also contains many bilingual pupils, as proved by the PISA assessments. These show our lack of ability to rectify social inequalities here in Denmark, compared to other countries. Even though many nation-wide efforts have been made in schools, in order to strengthen pupils' reading skills, we still have a major problem which remains unsolved.

Danish pupils' level of learning in subjects such as reading, maths, English and science does not meet the expectations of a school system that is supposed to prepare pupils to manage in a world of globalisation.

The lack of good results amongst girls in science subjects is outstanding and totally unacceptable for the individual as well as for society as a whole. The Danish Folkeskole aims to become one of the best schools in the world. We have appropriate conditions to fulfil the aim, and we appreciate the fact that our school system enhances children's social abilities and strengthens their attitude towards democracy. We have many pupils, teachers, parents and administrators highly committed to their work – so we have in our possession a great deal of human resources.

The number of teachers per pupil in Denmark is high compared to OECD countries. The younger classes have an average of almost 11 pupils per teacher and the older classes a little over 13 pupils per teacher. Furthermore, we have the next lowest number of pupils per class in OECD – less than 20. In other words: we spend more resources per pupil than other countries, but we do not see the results. Therefore, we have put aside additional funding to improve the quality of lessons: in total EUR 27 million per year. Furthermore, EUR 23,5 million have been earmarked for in-service training for teachers and administrators during the next four years, and more than EUR 14 million have been put aside to implement a plan of action for the improvement of pupils' reading skills.

On 28 March the Danish Folketing presented the draft legislative measures for improvement of the Folkeskole, elaborated on the basis of co-operation between various Danish political parties - The Liberals, the Conservatives, the Social Democrats and the Danish People's Party. The four parties have agreed on the formulation of a new mission statement for the Folkeskole. The current one is outdated, because it does not reflect the fact that knowledge is a determinant factor in today's society. The Folkeskole used to be considered, once finished, as a point in one's life where education went no further but



today the role and responsibility of the Folkeskole is to prepare its pupils for further education. This important change is reflected through the new mission statement that underlines the importance of knowledge and skills as being the key factor in facilitating personal development.

The political parties have also agreed to introduce initiatives to direct each school's attention towards the individual pupil and his/her learning. Does the pupil in fact learn what is expected in the Folkeskole? If not, immediate changes must be introduced. The Folkeskole is being criticised for not paying enough attention to the skills and knowledge of each individual pupil. The first official analysis showing this so far is the leaving examination after Year 9, and at this point it is of course too late to make up for what has not been done.

In 2004 the Danish Evaluation Institute presented a paper showing the poor level of evaluation culture in the Folkeskole. Even though regular evaluations in the Folkeskole were introduced by law already in 1993, these have not really been improved. This is also well documented by several OECD experts.

Therefore, the individual teacher will now get access to a comprehensive "tool box", where he or she can seek knowledge about evaluation procedures and how to strengthen a pupil in a specific subject.


One tool to be used is to introduce 10 compulsory tests in the Folkeskole, i.e. four reading tests, two maths tests and one in each of the subjects English, physical sciences/chemistry, geography and biology. The tests are elaborated on the basis of innovative research results, and they will be adapted to the conditions of the individual pupil. He or she will answer some introductory questions in order to set out the level of complexity of the test. The tests will provide the teacher with a profile of the pupil - a useful tool for the teacher in the classroom. The tests are not very time-demanding; in fact they will take out only 10 lessons of the total of 7 000 lessons taught in the course of the Folkeskole, but they will be used to follow the pupil's development and take progressive action.

Test results are confidential and may not be used to rank pupils. National results are published every year for each subject, in order for the teacher to compare class results with national results, but no ranking of the pupils is allowed.

The Danish Evaluation Institute and also OECD point out the lack of writing abilities amongst pupils in the Danish Folkeskole. Consequently, we are now introducing an individual education plan for all pupils, showing his or her results of the on-going evaluation and describing the decisions taken to follow up on this.

Many Danish schools have already developed individual education plans on their own. Since 1st January 2006, all Swedish pupils in primary school have been equipped with an individual development plan - this contains almost the same as the Danish education plan. The plan aims to provide teachers, pupils and parents with a future-oriented tool to strengthen the pupil's learning and fulfil the goals set out for each subject.

The Swedish association of teachers has reacted positively towards their Government's introduction of individual development plans. The association states that this is an important tool for learning and agrees with the Government that all children in primary school should have the right to an individual development plan. The association wants



the plans to comprise all school systems and to be introduced already in pre-primary school.

Here in Denmark we also need the assistance and professional knowledge of school administrators and teachers to develop and present proposals for the use of individual education plans. The Government does not intend to create a model to be used; the schools have far more knowledge and experience in this, and some of them have already shown us how to proceed.

Each pupil must reach the best of his or her abilities, both in terms of results and in terms of social skills. On the basis of the pupil's individual benefits, we shall define the goals of learning and follow up on the results. A prospective focus that has been identified on a well-documented basis is crucial in the follow-up process.

Up to now, pupils have been able to decide for themselves whether they wanted to take leaving examinations or not, but now these exams will become mandatory for all. We want to make sure that those pupils who have not taken their exams in some or all subjects will now jump on the bandwagon as well, instead of leaving them behind. The weakest pupils are most often those who are left behind.


Local authorities are responsible for their local Folkeskole. But as proved by the Danish Evaluation Institute in a study from 2005, there are huge differences in the way local authorities manage their responsibility. Therefore, the legislative measures also require the municipalities to elaborate a yearly quality report, describing the local school system, the learning level, the course of educational development etc.

In a case where general evaluation of a school shows that the learning level does not comply with the expectations, the school will be obliged to elaborate plans of action to improve this level. The issue shall be put forward and discussed amongst the local authorities; so that the people who have been elected to represent the local population will have a chance to follow the situation. Management in all levels as well as the Ministry of Education and our researchers must have better documentation of best practice. I look forward to the point where we can start complimenting ourselves on having better schools, instead of attention being pointed towards the second-rate results we have obtained so far.

Politicians do not intend to take away responsibility from the municipalities. On the contrary, we want to clarify their overall responsibility for our children's learning and direct their attention towards the individual school. In the same way it is the responsibility of each school to monitor the progress - or the lack of progress - of each individual pupil. The local authorities must administer this responsibility very carefully. Recent statements from The Local Authority Interest Organisation in Denmark outline this very clearly.

The national quality monitoring will be carried out by a new committee of evaluation and quality assurance in the Folkeskole. The committee shall follow up and provide guidance and counselling on the educational level and development. The committee will also look upon the consequences of a negative social inheritance and the integration of pupils from other cultures.

The draft proposal introduces more Danish lessons for pupils in Year 1-3, in order to discover and rectify reading problems at an early stage. There will also be more history



lessons, so that all pupils will get a chance to improve their historical and cultural knowledge.

The Government shall ensure that no Danish pupils are left behind from the beginning of their school course. Pupils must not feel that it is normal not being able to follow lessons, so it is very important that they get a good start in school with all the attention they need to succeed.

We have already introduced language screening of all bilingual 3-year-old children, followed up by additional language training if needed. We now intend to extend this measure to comprise all 3-year old children, so that any kind of problem can be immediately discovered and rectified.

All children will be obliged to attend kindergarten and reading lessons will be introduced already at this stage; thus kindergarten will be the new "Year 1". There will be language screening for all children at school start, so that teachers can conduct reading lessons on the basis of the child's abilities. School-based leisure time activities (SFO) shall be followed by a description of contents, and the SFO's shall offer assistance with homework as well as creative and physical activities. We will strengthen co-operation between schools, SFO's, music schools, sports clubs etc. I want to establish a close dialogue between all stakeholders in the school system. Therefore, I have introduced regular meetings with, amongst others, the president of the Danish Union of Teachers. Recently we discussed proposals for introducing stronger efforts to improve reading abilities in the classroom. We agree on a number of points, and I am pleased to know that the teachers have offered to help elaborate a strategy to half the number of poor readers in the Folkeskole. We shall meet and discuss this strategy in the very near future.

Furthermore, we will implement a plan of action for science, maths and English subjects. The Government has also taken other initiatives, such as:

- Revision of goals for some core subjects: We have put together working groups to revise the goals in history, religious studies and social science.
- Proposals for action plans: We have received proposals from four committees already, for action plans for reading, science, maths and English.
- Talent Camp: A so-called Talent Camp has been a useful source of inspiration. The Talent Camp started as a group of 48 people, who spent 48 hours evolving ideas on how to give the most talented pupils more of a challenge.
- Respect and order: A committee has elaborated a draft report on respect and order in the classroom, with a catalogue of inspiration and lots of good examples of practice.
- Management: The issue of management will be put on the agenda throughout the educational sector. We need to develop a management culture and an evaluation culture, based on our experiences about 'what works'. This will be the main theme of a congress in August, held here in Denmark.
- Teachers: Last, but not least, teacher training must be revised and improved, so that future teachers are far better equipped at professional and educational levels. We need more specialists to teach our children. Our aim shall be to ensure that teachers teach within their specialist subject.

We shall develop a new Folkeskole - not from scratch, as we have a great deal of useful experience and good practice already. We shall not reinvent the wheel, but we shall learn how to, in a better way, distinguish and promote good practice in order to disseminate it to schools across Denmark.



Index of Key Terms

assessment of special educational needs, **1, 7**

diagnosis, **17**

evaluation, **2, 6, 9, 11, 21, 22, 23, 24**

formative assessment, **8, 11, 17**

IEP, **10, 13, 16**

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