



DANISH MINISTRY
OF EDUCATION

Improving the Public School

– overview of reform of standards in the Danish
public school (primary and lower secondary
education)

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**DANISH MINISTRY
OF EDUCATION**



A new and different school day

In 2014, the school day of pupils in the Danish Folkeskole¹⁾ will change. Their school day will be characterised by more time for academic development and room for new ways to learn. The academic standard needs a lift, and all children must be challenged for them to reach their highest academic potential. Regardless of their social background. And with a high level of well-being.

The new school day provides good opportunities for interaction between the theory of school books, the surrounding society and the world the pupils are familiar with.

For example, schools can choose to collaborate with local sports clubs on exercises that teach the pupils English or maths through physical exercise. And why not use the local neighbourhood, the school trip, IT and social media or other parts of the pupils' everyday life in the teaching?

During the new school day there will be more time and opportunities for practical and application-oriented forms of teaching that promote innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity. Here focus is also on including everyday situations that the pupils are familiar with and consequently find relevant and interesting.

Add to this the good teaching environment, which is the very foundation for learning. Well-being and academic standards are mutually inclusive. Friendships and a calm atmosphere in class are preconditions for the pupils' motivation and opportunities to learn. And this also ensures the teachers the best teaching environment. Specifically, it will become mandatory for schools to monitor the pupils' well-being using a digital measuring tool that measures the pupils' learning environment, well-being, calmness and order.

The Danish Folkeskole is an open and inclusive school that creates whole persons. Therefore, school days will alternate between compulsory subjects and supporting teaching with a broader aim. Direct subject-related topics can, for example, be supplemented with exercises that strengthen the pupils' readiness to learn, social competences, many-sided development, motivation and well-being. This can, for example, include initiatives aimed to strengthen the community in class, visits to youth education programmes and much more.

The Danish Folkeskole is a place where all children, regardless of social background, must reach their academic potential, while at the same time enjoying their school day. A strong Folkeskole is a crucial part of our welfare society. And it is important that we both uphold and improve it.

Christine Antorini
Minister of Education

¹⁾ Common Danish term for the state-funded primary and lower secondary school

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Facts about the Danish Folkeskole

The Folkeskole is the Danish municipal primary and lower secondary school and it consists of a compulsory pre-school class, forms 1 to 9 and an optional 10th form. Danish children must as a rule begin their primary and lower secondary education in August of the year of the child's sixth birthday.

The objective of The Folkeskole is to prepare pupils for further education, and once the pupils have completed primary and lower secondary school they may choose to enrol in a youth education.

Municipal councils hold overall responsibility for the Folkeskole. This, among other things, means that local councils determine the content of the given municipality's school policy within the scope of the Folkeskole Act. It is also the responsibility of the municipal council that all children in the municipality are ensured the right to receive teaching in the Folkeskole.

Number of pupils

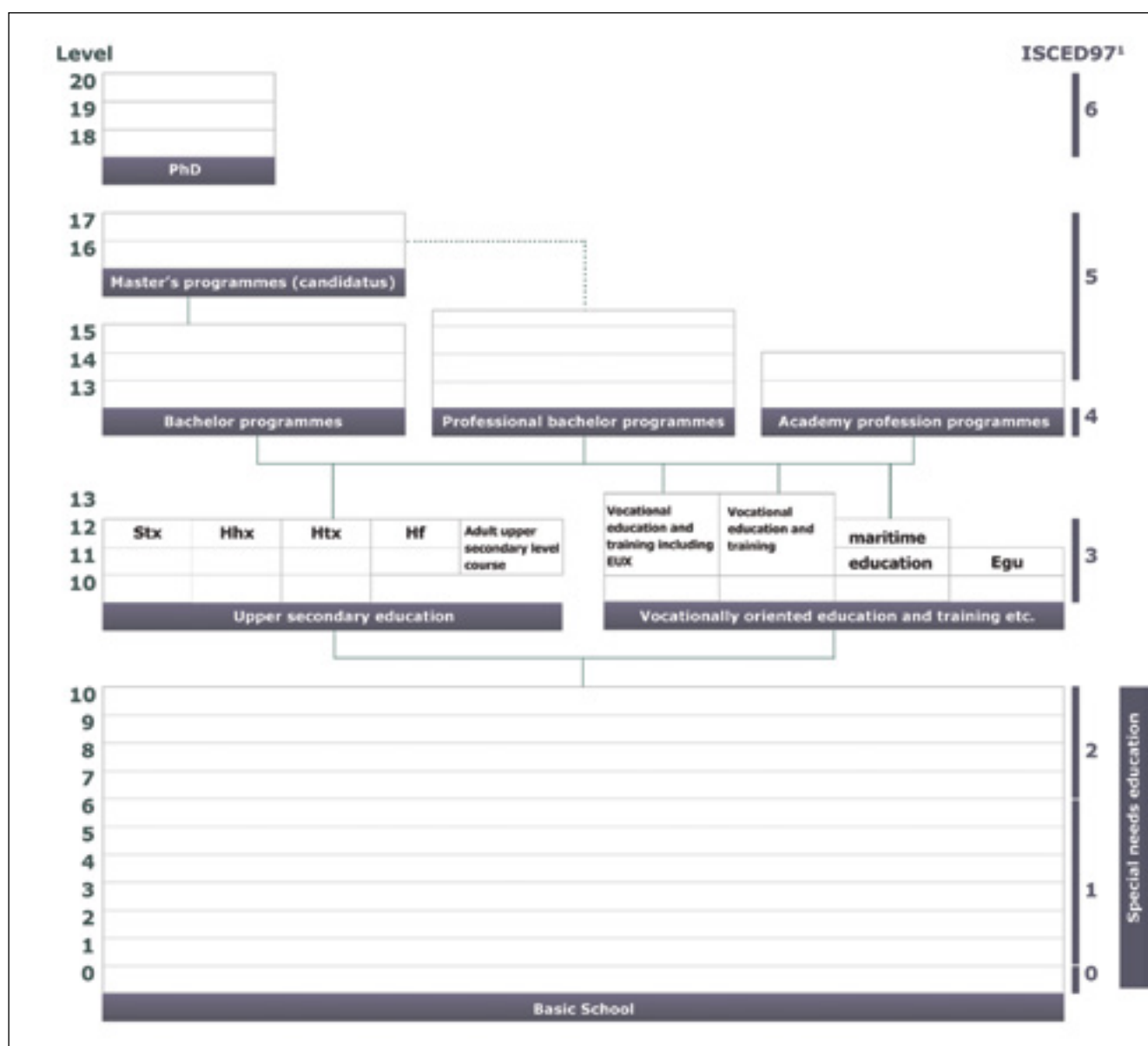
A total of 561,553 pupils attend the Danish Folkeskole.

That corresponds to approximately 82 per cent of all children and young people of compulsory school age.

These numbers were estimated in 2012.

Parents may influence the development of the school their child attends through the so-called school-home collaboration or by participating in the school board.

The position of the Folkeskole (Basic School) in the Danish education system:



Reform of the Danish Folkeskole – get an overview

In June 2013 a broad political agreement was signed with a view to giving the Folkeskole an academic lift.

On the following pages you can get an overview of the reform.

1. A longer and more varied school day

Students are given more time and support in a school day, where teachers and pedagogues collaborate on learning, motivation and well-being.

The reform of the Folkeskole means a longer school day. Concretely, this results in a school week of approximately:

- 30 hours for pre-school to form level 3,
- 33 hours for form levels 4 to 6 and
- 35 hours for form levels 7 to 9.

In the transition period until the next general election, the school week will, however, be shorter if pupils choose to opt out of the offer of homework assistance. This will result in a school week of:

- 28 hours for pre-school to form level 3,
- 30 hours for form levels 4 to 6 and
- 33 hours for form levels 7 to 9.

The teaching includes subject-divided lessons as well as additional time for assisted learning which will supplement and support the subject-divided lessons during the remainder of the school day.

Together with the longer and more varied school day the following changes will be introduced in regard to the distribution of lessons:

- An increase in the number of Danish lessons at form levels 4 to 9 by one additional lesson per week.
- An increase in the number of maths lessons at form levels 4 to 9 by one additional lesson per week.

- Introduction of English lessons at form levels 1 and 2 with one lesson per week.
- An increase in the number of physical education (PE) lessons at form level 1 by one additional lesson per week.
- An increase in the number of music lessons at form levels 1 and 5 by one additional lesson per week.
- An increase in the number of crafts and design lessons at form level 4 by one additional lesson per week.
- Introduction of a second foreign language at form level 5 with one lesson per week and at form level 6 with two lessons per week.
- An increase in the number of lessons in natural sciences/technology at form levels 2 and 4 by one additional lesson per week.
- Introduction of elective subjects from form level 7 with two lessons per week. Elective lessons will thus be introduced earlier than today. Besides, it will be possible for schools and municipalities to offer a greater variety of elective lessons than today, e.g. elective lessons in astronomy, metal-work/technology workshops and design of web-sites. It will also be possible to choose elective subject 'packages' featuring various themes such as innovation and natural sciences.

Besides, the subject of home economics will be modernised, and in this connection the name will be changed to Nutrition knowledge.

2. Assisted learning

The longer and more varied school day will give schools more time to teach by means of more subject-divided lessons and additional time for assisted learning.

Assisted learning will be used to work with a number of components which are important in order to ensure that the pupils are able to fully benefit from subject-divided lessons. It may be in the form of varied and differentiated learning techniques, exercises, in-depth study and practice in homework cafés and other assisted learning activities.

The purpose is to develop the pupils' receptiveness to education by working with their social skills, all-round development, motivation and well-being. In the transition period until the next general election it will, however, only be possible to offer homework assistance during the last lesson each afternoon and thus not as part of the school day.

The aim of both assisted learning and subject-divided lessons is to strengthen the pupils' academic levels. What distinguishes assisted learning from subject-divided lessons is that schools will have more freedom to plan assisted learning in such a way that it accommodates local needs and areas where a special effort is required.

It is the headmaster's responsibility to create coherence between subject-divided lessons and additional

time for assisted learning. Teachers must ensure continuity in their methods and that the academic goals for subjects and form levels are met. The time for assisted learning must be organised in a flexible manner by the municipalities, and it is the duty of the municipalities to ensure a suitable range of skills among the staff. The team formation rules do not apply to the time set aside for assisted learning.

Municipalities and individual schools may decide to convert additional time for assisted learning to subject-divided lessons in various subjects.

In addition, municipalities will be able to grant schools special permission to reduce the weekly teaching time in excess of the minimum number of subject-divided lessons – for specific classes by up to one year – provided that the number of subject-divided lessons is simultaneously increased by two adults, especially in Danish and maths.

Generally, the permission will apply to the younger classes, pre-school and form levels 1 to 3, and for form levels 4 to 9 to classes with special needs.

3. More PE and physical exercise and activity

Physical exercise and activity must be included to an extent corresponding to approximately 45 minutes per day during the longer and more varied school day.

Motivation levels and the learning process at large benefits from more physical exercise and activities that help improve the health of children and youth.

Physical exercise and activity may be included in the subject-divided lessons, e.g. PE, and in the assisted learning. This may be done by introducing short periods of physical activity such as a morning run, ball games or similar, other longer lasting and

continual activities, e.g. in cooperation with local associations such as sports clubs, cultural centres etc., or by using physical activity as a pedagogical tool in working with the contents of the subjects.

It is the duty of the headmaster to ensure that, within the overall teaching time, pupils participate in physical exercise and activity each day to an extent corresponding to an average of 45 minutes per day.



4. Homework assistance

Following the next general election it will be compulsory for schools to offer academic in-depth study and homework assistance as part of the longer school day.

The time for in-depth study and the offer of homework assistance etc. must focus on the academic level of the pupils, e.g. by offering academic training, academic challenges or intensified learning processes adapted to individual levels and needs. Time must be allocated for both academically strong and academically weak pupils.

Until the next general election the schools must offer homework assistance during the last lesson each afternoon. In this transition period pupils will be able to opt out of homework assistance and thus have a shorter school day.



5. Better teaching

The academic standards of all children must be improved, and a focused effort will thus be made to improve the quality of the lessons and ensure measurable improvements.

The clarification and simplification of Common Objectives must support the continuous improvement of the pupils' academic standards and ensure that pupils are at a higher academic level than previously when they leave the Folkeskole.

Common Objectives will be clarified and simplified to ensure learning objectives which are more focused on pupils' learning outcome, and which support the schools' work with goal-oriented teaching. Clear objectives for pupils' learning will contribute to increased academic standards for both the academically strong and the academically weak pupils.

The clarification of Common Objectives will, among other things, support the headmasters' work with goal-oriented teaching and the teachers' daily work with planning, execution and evaluation of the teaching. The scope and number of Common Objectives will be reduced and simplified considerably. The

clarification will help the headmasters, the parents (including the parental representatives on the school board) and the pupils to better understand the objectives in order for them to become active partners in relation to the learning process of the pupils.

Development of the subjects

Besides the clarification and simplification of Common Objectives, subjects must be developed systematically and dynamically. The latest expertise must be used to create the framework for the teachers' planning of the teaching and the academic development of the subjects.

A group of experts has already been established within the subject of maths. It might be considered whether similar systematic efforts should be made for other subjects in connection with or in continuation of the clarification and simplification of Common Objectives.



6. More lessons in Danish and maths

Danish and maths will be strengthened at form levels 4 to 9 by increasing the number of lessons for both subjects corresponding to one additional weekly lesson compared to the presently suggested number of lessons.

The increase in the number of lessons will be implemented at all schools by stipulating that the compulsory minimum number of lessons for Danish and maths at form levels 4 to 9 is 210 and 150 60-minute lessons, respectively, per form level.

The purpose of increasing the number of lessons for these two fundamental subjects is to provide more time for in-depth academic study and allow for a variation of teaching forms where all pupils – both the slow and the fast learners – may fully benefit from the teaching.

To improve the quality of Danish and maths lessons, funds will be set aside for a three-year research and development project which will develop new teaching methods for Danish and maths in order to challenge all children and make the teaching more relevant.

This may be done by incorporating IT as an integrated part of the teaching and – at the most advanced form levels – by using maths to solve practical tasks such as personal finances in order to make the subject more meaningful to pupils.



7. Strengthening of foreign languages

English will be introduced already from form level 1, and lessons in German or French will be moved up to form level 5 and made compulsory.

Most children will encounter English at an early age and are motivated to learn the language. Therefore, English will be introduced already from form level 1. The net number of lessons in English will be increased compared to the presently suggested number of lessons by one weekly lesson at form levels 1 and 2, respectively.

A good linguistic foundation will prepare Danish pupils for life in a globalised world where the demand for linguistic skills needed in order to survive in the job market is high – both in Denmark and abroad.

In order to strengthen the learning of a second foreign language, the lessons in German or French

will be moved up to form level 5 and made compulsory. This means that at form levels 5 and 6, the suggested distribution of lessons will include one and two lessons respectively in either German or French. At the same time it will become possible to exempt pupils from having to take a second foreign language starting from form level 7. As is the case according to the present rules for selection of subjects, the decision about exempting a pupil will be made in consultation with the pupil's parents and teachers, possibly including the Educational Youth Guidance.

Starting from form level 7 it will furthermore be possible for pupils to select a third foreign language as an elective subject. This may be German, French, Spanish or other foreign languages that the schools choose to offer.



8. New subjects: Crafts and design and Nutrition knowledge

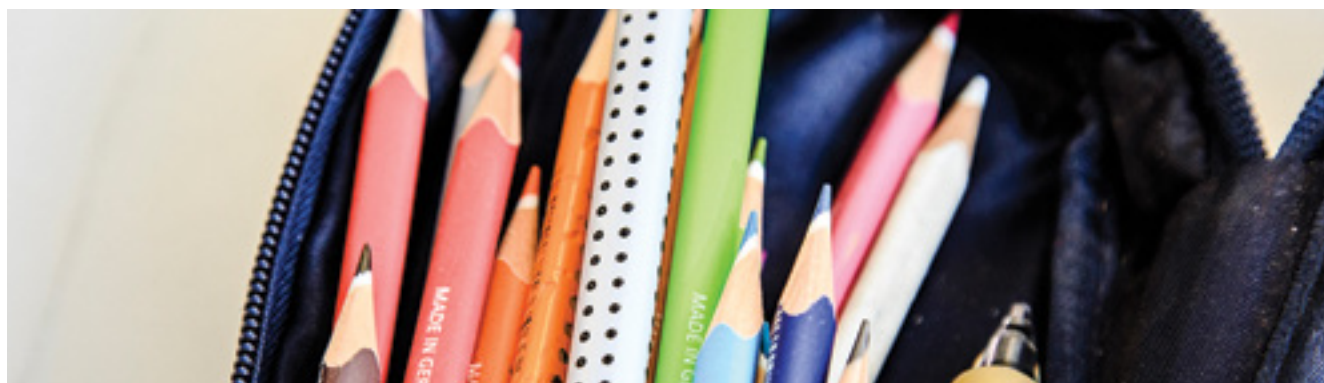
Woodwork and needlecraft and the subject of home economics make way for two new subjects.

The practical/musical subjects will contribute to the development of academic standards and standards of other subjects in the Folkeskole, especially Danish and maths.

Woodwork and needlecraft will thus be replaced by a new subject, Crafts and design, as part of elective subjects.

At the same time, the suggested number of lessons for Crafts and design is increased at form level 4 by one additional lesson per week.

The contents of the subject of home economics will be clarified, and the name will be changed to Nutrition knowledge.



9. The open school

Schools are encouraged to work more closely with local sports clubs, cultural centres and other associations.

Schools must be more open towards the surrounding community. This will be accomplished by integrating local sports clubs, cultural centres and other associations into the school day by committing municipalities to such cooperation. Besides, the Folkeskole and municipal music and arts schools must commit to collaborating. However, it is up to the individual school management to decide how collaboration is put into practice.

Besides supporting the subjects and general objectives of the Folkeskole, the aim of this collaboration is to ensure local cohesion and make familiarise pupils with the activities of various associations and the opportunities they offer.

The headmaster may allow pupils to fulfil their compulsory education by participating in music lessons at the municipality's music school or by participating in elitist sports at a sports club, e.g. in lieu of elective subjects.

The school board may establish principles for getting time off to participate in elitist sports training.

Furthermore, the headmaster may permit a pupil to fulfil his/her compulsory education by taking lessons at the municipal youth school in subjects that also exist within the Folkeskole.



10. Improved transition to higher education

Older pupils must be motivated to learn more and elective subjects provide them with the chance to focus on specific interests.

In order to accommodate older pupils' various interests and qualifications and increase their motivation, elective subjects are moved up from form level 8 to level 7 with two weekly lessons as the suggested number of lessons.

At the same time, elective subjects become compulsory. Pupils at form level 7 will thus be able to choose the same elective subjects that pupils at form level 8 may select today. This will also improve the municipalities' options with respect to transition programmes, including profile programmes, and the shaping of the transition. It will be possible for municipalities to approve lessons in elective subjects beyond elective subjects found under Common Objectives, including subjects which are not necessarily practical or art-oriented.

Increased focus on preparing pupils for further education

In order to ensure focus on a smooth transition from the Folkeskole to higher educations, the pupil plan and the education plan will be integrated into one

overall pupil plan. Pupils will thus have one overall document covering pre-school to form level 9. Simultaneously, the follow-up part of the pupil plan may already from form level 7 to a higher extent than today form the basis for a coherent transition programme with increased focus on challenging and clarifying the pupils' choice of education and preparing them for a post-compulsory youth education programme.

Besides, the parties behind the school reform agreement note that the government plans to introduce a bill, which will introduce evaluation of pupils' educational readiness at form level 8 and base it on objective criteria. The future pupil plan will be viewed in the context of and may be conceptually integrated into the government's proposal about advancing evaluation. The parties behind FL13 (the 2013 Finance Act) and the agreement concerning improved vocational education and training and a stronger education guarantee, such as Youth Package II, will be invited to a specific discussion on this matter.



As part of the effort to strengthen pupils' educational readiness and their knowledge of the job market, the plan is also to use the longer and more varied school day during the pupils' transition period to work more systematically with educational readiness, including the compulsory subject 'Educational, vocational and job market counselling' (UEA).

This subject will challenge the pupils' educational choices, and they will acquire a general knowledge of society and an understanding of the job market. Furthermore, this subject must ensure that pupils have some knowledge of the post-compulsory education system and what various types of youth educations may lead to.

Leaving examinations

The Folkeskole leaving examinations must have a greater influence on pupils' admission to post-compulsory youth educations. This will contribute to an increased focus on the importance of mastering skills needed for completing a vocational education and

training programme or an upper secondary education.

Consequently, it will be analysed how leaving examinations may gain greater importance and thus significance for pupils' admission to post-compulsory education, including an evaluation of whether this could be accomplished by introduction of grade levels, admission interviews etc.

The Folkeskole leaving examinations will be renamed the 'form level 9 examination', and the school diploma will be expanded by subjects/courses completed under the auspices of youth schools.

To increase focus on physical exercise and activity and the status of PE as well as the pupils' learning outcome within this subject, a final examination will be introduced in PE. At form level 9, PE will thus be included among the subjects which the pupils may be examined in.

11. Few and clear objectives for the Folkeskole

The strengths and the professionalism of the Folkeskole will be maintained and developed by working towards three objectives.

The three objectives are:

- 1) The Folkeskole must challenge all pupils to reach their fullest potential.
- 2) The Folkeskole must reduce the significance of pupils' social background for academic results.
- 3) The trust in the Folkeskole and pupil well-being must be enhanced by showing respect for professional knowledge and practice.

Year by year the Folkeskole reform must improve academic standards for all pupils. The national objectives point in one clear direction and set a high level of ambition for the development of the Folkeskole.

Operative result targets have been established for the national objectives, making it possible to continuously follow up on the development. The result targets are clear, simple and measurable:

- At least 80 per cent of pupils must be good at reading and maths in the national tests.
- The number of high-performance pupils in Danish and maths will increase year by year.
- The number of pupils with poor results in the national tests for reading and maths will be reduced year by year.
- The well-being of pupils will increase.

The objectives for academic development will be estimated based on the pupils' results in national tests. This will make it possible to follow their progression in Danish at form levels 2, 4, 6 and 8 and in maths at form levels 3 and 6.

The objectives will be estimated at national level, municipal level, school level, class level and for the individual pupil, and they will be a key element in the follow-up, which must take place at all levels in relation to development of the pupils' academic standards.



12. Competency development

The government will allocate DKK one billion between 2014-2020 to strengthen continued development of competencies among teachers and pedagogues in the Folkeskole.

To secure the best possible result of these efforts, all parties must accept greater responsibility, ensuring that efforts are planned and executed more efficiently, and thus that the latest evidence-based knowledge will be used in the daily teaching and the daily interaction with the children.

Teachers who are professionally immersed in the subject are to ensure that pupils receive an education of even higher academic and pedagogical quality.

The target is that, by 2020, all pupils in the Folkeskole will be taught by teachers who have either obtained main subject qualifications from their teacher education within the subjects they teach, or who have obtained corresponding academic qualifications through continued professional develop-

ment. This target applies to all subjects and all form levels and at municipal level.

The competencies of school headmasters and administrators will also be enhanced in relation to implementing and working with the contents and new management tools in the new 'all-inclusive' Folkeskole as part of a stronger pedagogical management. Headmasters and administrators will thus be equipped to steer through objectives and evaluations and use continued professional training of teachers and pedagogues strategically to achieve the objectives of the school.

As part of this effort, a state-financed pool of DKK 60 million has been set aside for continued professional training of headmasters in 2013-15.



13. Better learning environment and quietness in class

Quietness in class, good friendships, good classroom management and a good school environment are prerequisites for the pupils' desire to learn and their ability to do so. At the same time, they are prerequisites for teachers' ability to teach.

School headmasters, teachers and pedagogues must be better prepared for working with the learning environment and the pupils' general well-being, so that disruptions during lessons may be reduced and the pupils' social and academic development may be supported.

A tool will be developed, based on the guidelines of the Danish Centre for Teaching Environment, to enable municipalities and schools to work systematically and focused to increase the well-being of pupils in connection with academic development. The indicators must form the basis for new targets for well-being in the Folkeskole where continued digital measurements will create openness about well-being, quiet and good order and support the work and the dialogue between schools and municipalities about an improvement of the local learning environment.

A national effort will be launched to strengthen classroom management and reduce disruption of

teaching in the Folkeskole. The aim of the effort is to strengthen schools' work to establish routines, norms and rules in support of a good learning environment and ensure that there is a focus on classroom management in order to develop teaching and teachers' competencies.

An expert group with practitioners from municipalities and schools, as well as key staff from vocational schools and research institutions, will be appointed to describe existing research and knowledge about classroom management and gather tools and methods for development of class management. Materials and tools must be created in order to support the work of municipalities, schools and teachers related to learning environments, classroom disruptions and classroom management.

The gathered knowledge, tools and methods concerning classroom management will be applied by the corps of learning consultants who will be counselling municipalities and schools.

14. Learning consultants

A national corps of approximately 40 learning consultants will be established to offer municipalities and schools advice on quality development.

The corps will consist of highly skilled teachers and school headmasters. The learning consultants will contribute to the support of local competency development through counselling of municipal administrations and schools about the decentralised development of school practices and the pupils' academic results.

For instance, this could happen through sparring with management about best practices in school management and school culture as well as counselling regarding good methods, tools and knowledge in order to inspire teachers to develop the quality of their teaching, including advice about the contents and use of Common Objectives in the subjects and in differentiated teaching.

The learning consultants will provide advice, specifically aimed at the needs of individual schools.

Schools facing major challenges might need a special counselling process and help to restore quality, while better functioning schools might need advice within special areas such as stronger teacher collaboration.

It is imperative to also focus on the involvement of the municipal administration, so that it becomes a cohesive and strategic effort, in which the consultants' counselling is closely connected to activities and processes already established by the individual municipalities.



15. Stronger parental influence and increased pupil participation

Parents are an important resource and must contribute to the school's work, which will be specified in the Folkeskole Act.

The school board's principles for collaboration between school and home must spell out the principles for parents' responsibility in connection with the collaboration.

These principles will e.g. describe the school's expectations in relation to parents' participation in parent-teacher meetings, parent-teacher-pupil meetings as well as academic and social activities at school.

In this way, parents may contribute to shaping the approach to and the handling of the collaboration in which they play a crucial role. Moreover, this will ensure ownership of the principles in the parent group, thus making it possible to clearly define expectations to parents.

At the same time, an effort will be initiated to prepare parents for school board work. This effort will be launched in collaboration with the National Association of Schoolparents.

To ensure local democracy at schools with a divisional structure, it is suggested that parents from all divisions are secured representation on the school board. In addition to this, parents are free to establish parent councils etc. at various divisions.

Pupil involvement and pupil democracy are important factors in the development of a future school. Therefore, a project is being conducted in collaboration with the Danish Public School Students' Association concerning the involvement of pupils, which will provide a deeper understanding of the effects of involving pupils in planning and evaluation of the teaching.

To strengthen pupils' engagement and participation in the Folkeskole, an effort will be launched under the auspices of the learning consultants, aimed at deeper pupil involvement. Furthermore, a number of steps are taken to increase the number of pupil-to-pupil activities.



16. Simplification of rules

The Folkeskole will be managed based on few and clear objectives and be less dependent on rules and procedural demands.

These rule simplifications will contribute to schools and municipalities giving higher priority to pupils' learning.

In connection with the Folkeskole Act, the following simplification of rules must be implemented:

- Precision and simplification of Common Objectives
- Simplification of time management
- The demand that only teachers at the school may run the library is repealed
- Simplification of the rules concerning common management between the Folkeskole and after-school care
- More flexible rules in relation to school boards
- Elective subjects – municipalities must be able to develop and approve elective subjects
- Establishment of pedagogical councils to become optional
- Simplification and development of pupil plans
- Quality reports in a new format
- More flexible frames for the class teacher function
- Simplification and improvement of leaving examinations
- Relaxation of the team formation rules



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