

How
we

MOVE ON



**Pupils, parents, social pedagogues, teachers and
leaders working together to meet the challenges
facing public basic schools**

November 2007

Working together to meet the challenges facing public basic schools

Danish public basic schools (Folkeskole) are facing a number of acute challenges. These challenges demand a united front and popular backing if they are to be met. As stakeholders and practitioners in the municipal Folkeskole, we have discussed how, together or unilaterally, we can help meet these challenges and bring a united front with popular backing to the Folkeskole.

Action is needed right now, but qualified debate on the long-term goals is also required. Therefore we will continue our collaboration and discussions on, amongst other things, the work taking place in the Danish Council for Evaluation and Quality Development of the Folkeskole.

The opportunities available to teachers and pre-school teachers to ensure good teaching must be optimised, and social pedagogues must have room to promote their work on child development and wellbeing. This demands better pedagogical leadership at the individual school which, free of unnecessary bureaucracy, can take responsibility for the school's choice of evaluation methodologies and types of documentation in a collaboration with the school board and the municipal council.

Local resources and commitment are vital if a modern and flexible school is to live up to the wishes and needs of parents and children in the local community.

The parties have discussed a number of proposals and recommendations to support the common objective. We have focused on:

1. The inclusiveness of the school, cooperation between specialist groups, bilingual pupils and school-home cooperation.
2. Professionalism, sparring and inspection
3. Recruitment, retention and development of leaders and staff

The following is an account of the background for each of the three focus areas and our deliberations on how we can move on within the relevant area. Our deliberations have been realised in concrete recommendations.

We will take responsibility for continuing work on some of the recommendations ourselves. Others of the recommendations require the government and Parliament to take the necessary statutory initiatives.

A large number of the recommendations are cost-neutral. Several of them remove much of the bureaucracy in the work of schools and will make room for increased focus on the teaching task. Others of the recommendations call for additional resources in a number of the Folkeskole's key areas.

In this paper we would like to signal the common responsibility we as pupils, parents, social pedagogues, teachers and leaders have to secure that we work together for our shared Folkeskole.

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The inclusiveness of the school, cooperation between specialist groups, bilingual pupils and school-home cooperation

Background

A survey conducted by the Danish publications "Ugebrevet A4" and "Folkeskolen" showed that the number of pupils with academic problems is growing. Almost 50 percent of teachers have more pupils with weak academic levels than they had five years ago. However not all these pupils receive the support they need. This is despite the fact that the municipal pedagogical, psychological advice units (PPR) have recommended support for this group of pupils.

The Salamanca Declaration states that pupils have a right to be educated at the local Folkeskole and that parents have a right to involvement. Well functioning classes can easily cope with most of the pupils in the class, provided efforts are made to secure the required support.

The main argument for keeping pupils with special needs together with other pupils is that the Folkeskole is for everyone, and children should know that people are different. However, there is a limit for how inclusive the individual class can be, although everything should be done to include as many pupils as possible. In many contexts, teaching in classes for special needs children leads to better teaching and better schooling for pupils.

The municipal reform transferred responsibility for most special needs education to the municipalities. However, development of the municipal pedagogical, psychological advice units has not been able to keep up with the more demanding task. This means that there is often a waiting list of more than two months for pedagogical-psychological counselling. This also means that many children, not least those children with the greatest needs, do not receive the support and help they need and to which they have a right. This also affects work with the class as a whole. Furthermore it is important to assess whether the individual school has enough qualified teachers to teach pupils with very different diagnoses.

It is important that the Folkeskole works in cooperation with parents. Numerous international studies show that backing from parents and parental interest in children's schooling is extremely important for children's learning. Therefore it is natural that focus at the individual school, and in the media, is on school-home cooperation.

The school board sets the principles for school-home cooperation, while the school leader, in cooperation with the staff, realises these principles in the concrete practices at the school. In practice, this cooperation is usually perceived as close cooperation between the school and parents. The two parts often have different expectations of what the cooperation should include, the specific form of the cooperation, its framework etc.

Reporting from the school to the home about the school's view of what pupils are getting out of their schooling is often in practice part of the school-home cooperation, rather than being independent reporting as described in the legislation. This may seem to be a natural consequence of the knowledge about the significance of parents for children's learning. The form of this reporting usually differs from

school to school, but at many places it starts with two annual parent-teacher meetings for which an equal length of time is allocated for each child's parents. The Folkeskole Act describes plans for individual pupils as a tool for the teacher when planning teaching, but these plans also underline the importance of cooperation with parents on pupils' learning.

How do we move on?

To take account of the needs of all pupils, the necessary resources must be procured to solve the inclusiveness issue.

In this context, cooperation between specialist groups at the school should be optimised so that leaders, teachers, pre-school teachers, social pedagogues, social workers and other relevant specialist groups are ensured space to deal with the common task. A large number of pupils' problems can also be regarded as social problems which require intervention from social workers from the municipal social services, for example.

Both in connection with pupils' transition from daycare to school and in the transition from basic school to upper secondary education, massive resources should be applied and there should be full inter-institutional cooperation in order to minimise the effects of negative social inheritance.

Some schools have introduced differentiated school-home cooperation, in which conducting two annual parent-teacher meetings with the same length of time for everyone is not automatic. At these schools models have been implemented in which the number of meetings, their content and length, are adapted to the individual parent's needs. A specific example is described in the DISKO report on dialogue in the school. This report was issued following a project conducted by the Danish Union of Teachers, School and Society (National Association of Parents and School Boards), and the Ministry of Education. The report is available (in Danish) at www.uvm.dk.

Another topic in the public debate is whether teachers and social pedagogues have adequate knowledge about school-home cooperation to enable them to perform this task satisfactorily. This is not just routine cooperation, but also whether there is adequate knowledge about the many different cultural backgrounds in the homes from which pupils come. This topic is relevant for parents with their entire cultural background in Denmark, but with different social circumstances, or for immigrant parents from countries with very different traditions for school-home cooperation.

On this basis it may seem natural to assess whether developments in school-home cooperation, including schools' practice to integrate communication to homes about the schools' view of pupils' benefits from teaching, should lead to new considerations about clarifying or amending the current provisions in the Folkeskole Act on this area. The parties behind this cooperation will continue their work on drawing up proposals for the content and form of differentiated school-home cooperation. Including:

- Clarification of mutual expectations regarding school-home cooperation within the framework of the Folkeskole Act (including school-based leisure-time activities, SFO)
- Local implementation of introduction programmes for new parents
- Cooperation on the individual class
- Information from the school to the home about pupils' benefits from schooling, including cooperation on the individual child's learning.

- Forms of differentiated school-home cooperation which secure cooperation with all parents, including bilingual parents, parents of children with special needs etc.

It should also be considered whether there is a need for separate initiatives for school-home cooperation with parents of special needs children, parents of bilingual children etc. Therefore the work group stresses the importance of upgrading the knowledge of staff about the background of bilingual pupils and participation by their parents in life at school.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that the necessary framework and expertise be secured with a view to a targeted, inclusive Folkeskole.
- It is recommended that the individual school be secured the framework required to promote cooperation between teachers, social pedagogues, social workers and other specialist groups, both municipal and at the individual school, with a view to qualified performance of both teaching and social tasks.
- It is recommended that Folkeskole stakeholders together describe the conditions and requirements which could help soften the distinction between the Folkeskole's ordinary and special-needs interventions. Specifically, it is recommended that pupils are ensured the right to a rapid municipal pedagogical, psychological advice unit assessment with follow-up help in order identify the options and possible solutions the individual school can/should implement.
- It is recommended that the Danish Union of Teachers, School and Society (National Association of Parents and School Boards), Danseuse School-leaver (an organisation representing pupils), the Danish National Federation of Early Childhood Teachers and Youth Educators as well as leader/head-teacher associations set up a work group to examine the content and form of differentiated school-home cooperation.
- It is recommended that resources be secured for the individual school to set higher priority on training in intercultural pedagogics at the individual school in order to improve leaders', teachers', social pedagogues', parents' and pupils' understanding of the background of bilingual pupils.

Professionalism, sparring and inspection

Evaluation of routine work at schools

Background

It is important that pupils' progress and wellbeing is constantly monitored so that teaching and the school's school-based leisure-time teaching and activities can be based on the requirements and development possibilities of the individual pupil.

This brings to the forefront the ambition to evaluate regularly how pupils benefit from teaching and other activities. Such an evaluation should form the basis for guidance for the individual pupil and for further planning of the organisation and form of teaching, including special interventions for the individual pupil. Similarly, the evaluation is also the basis for informing parents about the school's view of how the pupils are benefiting from the school and their wellbeing at school, in order to enhance further the ongoing dialogue between the school and home.

Since the importance of this regular evaluation was specified in the 1993 Folkeskole Act, increasing emphasis has been placed on using evaluation in the work of the Folkeskole, but experience indicates that there should be more focus on enhancing internal evaluation at schools.

In the October 2004 Ministry of Education report with the Folkeskole's reply to the OECD recommendations, all the Folkeskole's parties also agreed that evaluation should be enhanced, that a development project should be initiated to set up a Danish model for evaluation of pupils' benefits from schooling, and that new tools were required for this.

The report suggests that a toolbox should be set up with a range of evaluation tools, and that this should be made available for schools and teachers, including subject-specific tools, guidelines, elements of continuing training modules, campaigns and diagnostic tests. For example for individual pupil's reading skills in 2nd and 4th years (8 and 11 year-olds) as well as numerism and solving mathematical problems in the 6th year (13 year-olds). Tests should supplement existing diagnostic tests.

The tests to be used in connection with regular evaluation should be part of the dialogue between the school's various actors. This may be:

- in school-home cooperation
- in the school board's dialogue with the school's other parties
- in cooperation between teachers on organisation of teaching
- in teacher/pupil cooperation on setting goals
- in cooperation between the school leaders and teachers/other leaders
- in cooperation between the school and the administration

The report to the OECD emphasised that the tests should be forward-looking. They should be a tool for dialogue and documentation which can be used internally and results should not be made public.

A number of compulsory, national tests have now been introduced in schools in Danish (reading) for the 2nd, 4th, 6th and 8th years (8, 10, 12 and 14 year-olds), in mathematics for the 3rd and 6th years (9 and 12 year-olds), in English for the 7th year (13 year olds) as well as biology and geography for the 8th year (14 year-olds). There has been a number of teething problems. Therefore the government has reduced the number of tests to be completed in this school year. (Reading for the 2nd, 4th, 6th and 8th years, physics/chemistry for the 8th year as well as mathematics for the 3rd and 6th years.)

In October 2007, the Agency for the Evaluation and Quality Development of Primary and Lower Secondary Education carried out a review of the compulsory tests. This describes the problem that the tests are to be used to monitor the level of the school and as a pedagogical diagnostic tool for teachers.

In addition to the range of tests, a range of other materials is being prepared, for example regular evaluation in individual subjects.

However, there is only a limited amount of material for the follow-up necessary after the tests have been completed.

How do we move on?

It is proposed that work continue on developing the models for evaluation outlined in the reply from the Folkeskole to the OECD recommendations. The point of departure is that the school boards can stipulate principles for how schools can carry out regular evaluation of whether teaching and pupils' benefits from teaching live up to expectations.

On this basis, the model for enhancing schools' evaluation builds on four pillars:

1. A tool box developed by the Ministry of Education, containing a range of evaluation and follow-up tools made available to schools. Tests will continue to be part of regular evaluation by schools. The individual school (school board, school leader, and pedagogical council) determines which tests are to be used. The tests used by the school must be in accordance with common goals. The tool box is supplemented with material for evaluation and further development of work within school-based leisure-time activities.
2. Self-evaluation/internal evaluation is an important part of the learning process. Material is currently being developed for this. The aspect of self-evaluation/internal evaluation is being enhanced in connection with the current legislative process regarding the Danish Evaluation Institute.
3. At the end of the school year, the individual school is obliged to account for how it has tackled the evaluation process, including how the test results have been included in information from the school to parents about pupils' academic development. Staff and school leaders must together develop the evaluation process. The initiative aims at helping ensure that all staff discuss with their leaders how they evaluate and the evaluation practice at the school. It also aims at helping school boards take a position on this.
4. An evaluation of the various methods of assessment and materials. Today it is unlikely that there is a type of evaluation that is not being used at, at least one Danish Folkeskole. In this regard there are also examples of "good evaluation practice".

Recommendation

It is recommended that evaluation work at schools be enhanced. The school decides which type of evaluation, including tests, it will use. Each year the school accounts for how it deals with evaluation.

A quality system to promote commitment at the Folkeskole

Background

In the most recent Folkeskole agreement in 2006 it was agreed that each municipal council should prepare annually a quality report on the Folkeskole.

The purpose of these annual quality reports was to enhance the possibilities of the municipal councils in their responsibilities for the Folkeskole. The report was also to promote dialogue and systematise ongoing cooperation on evaluation and quality development.

According to the Folkeskole Act, the quality report must describe the municipal school system, the academic level of the school, the measures taken by the municipal councils to assess the academic level, and the follow-up by the municipal councils of the latest quality report.

A detailed executive order has been issued pursuant to the Act which includes the points to be described. In addition, the municipal council has some freedom to describe municipal focus areas.

Quality reports for the first year have now been completed and a large number of these have also been examined by the municipal councils, as prescribed in the Act.

Preliminary reports from schools indicate that the individual member of staff has not usually been involved in the process to an appreciable extent. However, the school boards are usually consulted about the completed reports, as prescribed by the Act.

How do we move on?

The goal of quality work at the Folkeskole is to stimulate dialogue, development and renewal without impairing the many strengths of the school. This requires that change is anchored with those at the school every day and with the school boards, and that it is stimulated by commitment which can only be secured by instilling involvement and influence.

It must be possible to adapt how this is to take place from municipality to municipality and from school to school. Basically the approach must ensure a constructive, forward-looking dialogue between day-to-day staff at the school, the school board, and the municipal council. How this is to be done must also be decided locally.

One model may be:

- The point of departure is that the individual school itself should be responsible for ensuring quality and development, but within the goals and framework, including budget, defined by the municipal council.
- After consulting the school board and the pedagogical council, the school leader is responsible for selecting focus areas on the basis of an assessment of the required future direction for the school. The leader's assessment will include the overall schools policy in the municipality, principles laid down by the school board, and feedback from the rest of the leader team and staff at the school.

- The quality and development report from the school leader, as prepared in dialogue with those mentioned above, is sent to the school board for comment and then forwarded to the municipal council for approval together with an account of the academic level of pupils and their wellbeing.
- The important provisions on the quality and content report only focus on the framework for teaching in the form of figures for pupils' hours, cancelled hours/lessons, availability of substitute teachers, opportunities for special needs education etc. Most of this information is already available. In addition, as in the current situation, the municipal council can stipulate other information the school is to report.
- The report is followed up with a dialogue between the municipal council, the leader and the school board. Adjustments are made if necessary according to the feedback from the municipal council. (Within the frameworks of the respective formal competencies with the municipal council, school board, school leader and other leaders as well as with staff.)
- In the following school year the school reports on the results in a new quality report which, having been submitted to the school board, is discussed with the municipal council, after which the school presents new specific goals etc.
- On the basis of the reports from the schools, a municipal quality report is drawn up.

The most important argument for this approach is that the school itself has the best basis for forming an overall view of how to secure solutions to problems and continued development. Similarly, the school can identify any problems in connection with the framework conditions under which it must operate.

The model promotes commitment amongst the people in and around the school on a daily basis and in the work of the school board. Therefore the model also helps promote individual commitment to realising the objectives of the Folkeskole Act and to meeting the aims set out in the objects section of the Act.

In accordance with Danish school tradition and culture, the model is anchored locally.

Recommendation

It is recommended that a locally anchored quality system be introduced, which builds on local involvement and dialogue between schools and municipalities in order to enhance academic skills and wellbeing at every individual school. The decision regarding how this is to be done should be taken locally. This replaces the current quality reports.

Development meetings with pupils and parents as part of regular evaluation at the school

Background

According to the Folkeskole Act, pupils and parents must be informed regularly about the school's view of how pupils are benefiting from their schooling. So far the legislation has not stipulated how and to what extent this should be done. The most recent agreement on the Folkeskole seeks to strengthen written skills through the plans for individual pupils, which include contributions from teachers of all subjects.

Teachers and pupils from each class year and for every subject work together

in day-to-day teaching on setting goals and ensuring these are met, see the Folkeskole Act

Experience from the first year's work on plans for individual pupils indicates a need for more flexible frameworks for how the individual school can strengthen written skills in the ongoing evaluation. The current rules do not leave much space for school boards, leaders, teachers and social pedagogues to implement the most appropriate initiatives in the context of the individual school.

How do we move on?

Dialogue should be the hub of school/home cooperation. Direct meetings with parents enable the school staff to present the most subtle information on the pupil's knowledge, skills and wellbeing, and parents are able to report their own observations.

The dialogue should be constructive and forward-looking on the basis of a common objective. What can we do together to promote continued development and wellbeing for the pupil, given the pupil's current situation?

In addition to statutory initiatives, there is a need to prepare inspirational material to support the dialogue between school and home.

The overall goal is to strengthen school-home cooperation, which is differentiated and adapted to the needs of the individual pupil.

This could be through the following model, for example:

1. As part of the ongoing evaluation of teaching, the school holds development meetings twice a year with each pupil's parents, and the pupil is also invited to take part. The development meeting sets goals for the pupil's future learning and includes discussions on how the parents and the school can help the pupil achieve these goals in the period up to the next meeting. The point of departure is the goals that were set at the previous development meeting, follow-up to these, goal achievement, as well as the pupil's development and wellbeing. Amongst other things, the meeting builds on written material, see points 2 and 3.

2. Before the development meeting, the individual school (school board, leader and pedagogical council) set the detailed framework for the development meeting. This includes the written material to be included on pupils' academic level of attainment, wellbeing etc.
3. During the course of the development meeting results, goals and agreements are noted on paper/IT. After the development meeting, the pupil's parents receive a written summary which will form the basis for future teaching and the next development meeting.
4. Any irregularities from parents (such as absence from meetings) are dealt with through feedback from the school by telephone, in writing, or in some other way and new arrangements are made.
5. Greater priority is afforded to ensuring that information (in writing) about the individual pupil is forwarded from teacher to teacher when the class changes teacher. The written material may also be part of team cooperation.

Recommendation

It is recommended that school-home cooperation be enhanced by replacing the plan for individual pupils with forward-looking development meetings. The individual school decides the framework for the development meetings and the written material. Goals for teaching are set at the meeting on the basis of the pupil's level of attainment. Parents receive written minutes of the meeting. Together with other material, this comprises the basis for the next development meeting.

Renewal of the Folkeskole leaving examination

Background

Since 2003 there has been a great deal of confusion about the Folkeskole leaving examination. For example a joint exam has been introduced for natural subjects. This exam has now been discontinued. Group exams, where the form is much like the daily routine at the Folkeskole and the time after school, have also been abolished.

A decision has also been taken regarding compulsory leaving examinations for all pupils.

In addition not all subjects at the Folkeskole have been subject to examination. Practical/musical subjects, which less academic pupils may be especially good at, have not been subject to examination.

Developments as a whole in recent years have addressed single elements around the Folkeskole leaving examination, and these have been looked at in isolation, one by one. This means that a great deal of uncertainty and frustration regarding the exams has arisen amongst pupils, parents and teachers.

A work group has been set up under the Ministry of Education to look at alternative types of examination, but this work is within a limited framework which, for example, does not leave room to suggest group exams.

How do we move on?

There is a need for broad and considerably more holistic consideration of the Folkeskole leaving examination so that the exam can reflect daily work at the school to a much greater degree. Consideration which is not limited to narrow frameworks and conditions.

Therefore, a new work group is proposed with Folkeskole stakeholders who together are to present proposals for a development programme for new and modernised leaving examinations.

The main question will be:

What will the overall Folkeskole leaving examination look like in the future? Discussions will include:

- Types of examination:
 - Written or oral exams
 - Use of ICT-based exams
 - Possible inter-disciplinary examinations
 - Organisation of examinations (individual exams, group exams etc.)
- Should the examinations be compulsory or voluntary?
- How many subjects should be subject to examination?
- The relationship between the examinations, day-to-day work at schools and the time after school.

The group are also to present a plan for implementation which secures an appropriate timetable.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Folkeskole leaving examination be modernised and organised so that it much better reflects the daily teaching and the demands pupils will face in education and at work after their time at school. This involves opening possibilities for group examinations.

A school in the local community with independent leaders and school board

Background

The Folkeskole Act clearly stipulates the division of responsibilities for the Folkeskole as well as the rights of parents and pupils.

The point of departure for the Act, or the intentions of the Act, have been that a school unifies the building and geographical area in which it is located, it has a school leader and a school board, and each school is linked to a school district which ensures pupils the right to attend a Folkeskole in their local area.

However, neither the Folkeskole Act nor the Act on Private Independent Schools contains any specific requirement that a school should unify the building and geographical area in which it is located.

The lack of clarity in the legislation means that, in their deliberations about a new school structure after the municipal reform, many municipalities have been working with proposals to merge several schools into one school, but with geographically separate teaching locations. If several schools become one school, there must only be one school leader with overall administrative and pedagogical responsibility, one school board and one school district. This means the individual building units become departments of the school without independent school leaders and school boards. Pupils' right to go to a school in the vicinity of their home is undermined. Parents' influence is diluted and the conditions for pedagogical leadership of the schools become significantly poorer.

How do we move on?

The individual school should be secured its own school district, its own independent school leader and its own school board. This could be done as in the Act on Independent Private Schools, for example, where an independent school unifies the building and geographical area in which it is located.

Recommendation

It is recommended that an independent school unify the building and geographical area in which it is located.

Recruitment, retention and development of leaders and staff

Recruitment, retention and development of leaders

Background

The general negative reputation of the Folkeskole also affects the recruitment and retention possibilities for school leaders and heads of school-based leisure-time activities. Coupled with the increasing demands for documentation, figures and control over recent years, the job of leading a Folkeskole has become less attractive (e.g. see the report on school leaders at the Folkeskole (in Danish) Skoleledelse i folkeskolen, Danish Evaluation Institute, 2008).

In order to be able to attract and retain leaders for all management tasks at the Folkeskole, it is important to create space for leaders' dialogue with the staff on organising and executing teaching, and meeting objectives. Leaders must be secured real opportunities to provide sparring for staff on their development and to support teachers in their teaching. It is important to secure clarity on allocation of responsibilities between the different management levels at the school.

The strong and increasing decentralisation of competences to schools means that much is expected of the professional leaders at schools. Development opportunities and ongoing competence development of leaders is therefore crucial. At the same time it should be highlighted that positive and constructive cooperation between the school's parents, school board and school leaders is a positive factor in relation to retaining leaders.

Leaders at the Folkeskole are employed by the municipality and they need management, development and sparring with their leaders in the administration, including clarification of competencies, development meetings etc.

How do we move on?

In addition to the existing diploma programmes in leadership, there should be a highly qualified range of management courses for heads of institutions, which provide the individual leader with a relevant leadership and professional skills. Management courses should be designed in modules so that the individual leader can put together a customised and targeted education programme which progresses according to a skills-development plan drawn up in cooperation with the leader's superiors.

With regard to recruitment, it is important that all the leaders at the school work as a team with a view to sparring and executing leadership tasks. This can inspire potential leaders. Work should also continue on pre-leader courses.

Recommendations

It is recommended:

- that school leaders are secured the possibility to execute pedagogical and administrative tasks at the school.

- that documentation and administration support leaders' opportunities for ensuring the best possible teaching.
- that leaders are able to delegate tasks to staff.
- that school leaders, in cooperation with their immediate superiors, prepare personal competence development plans.
- that school leaders are offered continuing training programmes as part of ongoing competence development.
- that municipalities introduce and utilise mentor schemes for leaders.
- that leaders' superiors deal with leaders' health and safety issues.
- that initiatives for pre-leaders be rendered high priority in municipalities and by training course providers.
- that allocation of competency between the different management levels be clarified.
- that all leaders be secured management training.

Recruitment, retention and development of staff

Background

Studies have documented that the very negative publicity about the working conditions for staff in the practical professions, including teachers, have been a contributory factor to the fact that young people are not choosing degree courses for these professions (e.g. Valg og fravalg af lærer-, pedagog-, sygeplejerske- og socialrådgiveruddannelsen, a study by Epinion for the Danish Ministry of Education). For example, teacher training has seen a drop of almost 50 percent in the number of applicants over the past five years.

With regard to guidance in both the senior classes at Folkeskole and in upper secondary education, feedback from Danske School-leaver (an organisation for primary and lower secondary pupils), Danske Gymnasieelevers Samråd (an organisation for upper secondary pupils) and Lærerstuderendes Landskreds (an organisation for student teachers) indicates that medium-cycle further and higher education is not covered adequately in guidance on the professional basic education programmes and the academic education programmes.

The drop-out rate from teacher training programmes has increased in recent years, about one quarter of students drop out before completing their courses. According to student teachers, the reason for this drop out may be the lack of guidance about courses, the poor cohesion between theory and practice, and a poorer study and teaching environment arising from cut-backs in the area.

To a much greater degree than previously, both newly qualified and more experienced staff are considering leaving the Folkeskole because of criticism from their surroundings, increasing demands for documentation, and the perceived lack of public confidence. The negative publicity about the school and the increasing demands have also had a great deal of influence on the working environment of staff working at the Folkeskole. Many people working at the Folkeskole are reporting sick because of stress and poor working conditions.

In recent years there has been a growing understanding for the importance of staff and leaders being offered continuing training opportunities as an important part of their development. Both the globalisation strategy (Progress, Innovation and Cohesion, Globalisation Council, 2006) and the tripartite agreement of summer 2007 emphasise this point.

The Folkeskole has been granted an extraordinary allocation of DKK 230 million to train a specialist reading teacher and one teacher per school at main subject level in natural subjects, mathematics and English with a view to them acting as advisors for the other teachers in these subjects at the school. The allocation also includes funds to train leaders to diploma level, It is very positive that the Folkeskole has received additional funds for these areas, as well educated teachers are crucial for pupils' teaching. However, given the increasing importance of pupils' academic benefits and the political ambition that teachers should have a main subject in the subject they are to teach, this is a frail start. At the same time, joint financing of education funding is creating problems in municipalities with economic problems. The risk here is that funding will not be realised or that joint financing results in cuts in pupils' teaching.

Since 1993 it has been normal practice for municipalities to work together on ordering locally organised continuing training, firstly from the Royal School of Education Studies (DLH) and later from teacher training colleges and CVUs, where appropriately sized groups have been put together. Clearly this saves a lot of travelling costs and time.

Many schools have completed trials in which they include social pedagogues and teachers in each others' work. Enhancing understanding between the two professions benefits pupils and parents. For example, development may be by concentrating on new networks across professions and work areas. This would enhance school start, cooperation with parents, and how children experience school as a whole.

How do we move on?

In order to ensure a high professional and pedagogical level at the Folkeskole as well as an adequate number of committed employees, it is important that all stakeholders in the Folkeskole, Parliament, the government, municipalities and labour market organisations, continue to expand efforts to re-establish the Folkeskole's reputation in a trusting interplay.

Guidance and advice at the Folkeskole and in upper secondary education must be enhanced so bachelor programmes in the profession are considered as an opportunity on equal footing with long-cycle further and higher education and possibilities for a commercial basic education.

Many young people become clear about where their higher education interests lie during their time in upper secondary education. They learn about a large number of subjects and subject areas. However, an area such as pedagogics seems absent. Psychology is a popular subject in upper secondary education. If pupils have the opportunity to choose pedagogics (perhaps in connection with psychology), this would possibly arouse their interest in the pedagogical education programmes.

In order to reduce drop out from teacher training programmes, guidance about the programmes must be improved. There is also a need to enhance the practical training part of the programmes. There should be better cohesion between theory and practice, for example in the form of more extensive cooperation between educational institutions and schools. The practical training period should provide a realistic picture of the job of being a teacher and school-home cooperation should be included as a natural part of the practical training.

It is especially important for newly qualified teachers that a mentor scheme is set up under which an experienced teacher is linked to a newly qualified teacher to ensure that the newly qualified teacher can receive the guidance required.

A policy for introducing new staff at all schools, including school-based leisure-time activities could help improve conditions for new employees. It would be an advantage if the school board could support such initiatives.

A general raise in professional standards requires opportunities for continuing training within all subjects at the Folkeskole. It must be possible to complete continuing training in all parts of Denmark, if offers are to be realistic for all schools. Moreover training must have a scope and level corresponding to requirements.

This ensures that any extraordinary allocations for continuing training actually lead to extra continuing training of the scope intended by the allocation.

Where possible, through long-term teaching planning, teams should be set up within the individual municipality or in cooperation with neighbouring municipalities in order to achieve savings through commissioned teaching. In addition to continuing and further training, learning on the job can also be extended through establishing subject committees and professional networks for school staff.

Recommendations

It is recommended:

- that all stakeholders in the Folkeskole help create forward-looking and constructive debate on the Folkeskole
- that guidance on professional bachelor programmes be enhanced
- that guidance on teacher training programmes be enhanced
- that sound and inspiring study and teaching environments be established at educational institutions
- that schools and municipalities draw up principles for receiving new teachers and social pedagogues.
- that schools and municipalities ensure that sound working and teaching environments are established
- that local and central politicians ensure that resources appropriated for continuing and further training are utilised for the purpose intended.
- that politicians follow up on the ambition that teachers should have a main subject in the subject they teach, so that teachers can live up to the requirement for high academic skills.
- that schools are secured the possibility for internal learning through subject committees and professional networks in order to enhance exchange of knowledge between staff and to ensure subject development.
- that schools draw up an overall training plan and a plan for individual employees so that staff are clear about when and to what extent training is offered.
- that networks be set up at schools including both social pedagogues and teachers.

Recommendations and proposals - an overall review

The inclusiveness of the school, cooperation between specialist groups, bilingual pupils and school-home cooperation

- It is recommended that the necessary framework and expertise be secured with a view to a targeted, inclusive Folkeskole.
- It is recommended that the individual school be secured the framework required to promote cooperation between teachers, social pedagogues, social workers and other specialist groups, both at municipal level and at the individual school, with a view to qualified performance of both teaching and social tasks.
- It is recommended that Folkeskole stakeholders together describe the conditions and requirements which could help soften the distinction between the Folkeskole's ordinary and special-needs interventions. Specifically, it is recommended that pupils are ensured the right to a rapid municipal pedagogical, psychological advice unit assessment with follow-up help in order to identify the options and possible solutions the individual school can/should implement.
- It is recommended that the Danish Union of Teachers, School and Society (National Association of Parents and School Boards), Danske Skoleelever (an organisation representing pupils), the Danish National Federation of Early Childhood Teachers and Youth Educators as well as leader/head-teacher associations set up a work group to examine the content and form of differentiated school-home cooperation.
- It is recommended that resources be secured for the individual school to set greater priority on and improve teaching in intercultural pedagogics at the individual school in order to improve leaders', teachers', social pedagogues', parents' and pupils' understanding of the background of bilingual pupils.

Professionalism, sparring and inspection

Evaluation of routine work at schools

- It is recommended that evaluation work at schools be enhanced. The school decides which type of evaluation, including tests, it will use. Each year the school accounts for how it deals with evaluation.

A quality system to promote commitment at the Folkeskole

- It is recommended that a locally anchored quality system be introduced, which builds on local involvement and dialogue between schools and municipalities in order to enhance academic skills and wellbeing at every school. The decision on how this is to be done should be taken locally. This replaces the current quality reports.

Development meetings with pupils and parents as part of regular evaluation at the school

- It is recommended that school-home cooperation be enhanced by replacing the plan for individual pupils with forward-looking development meetings. The individual school decides the framework for the development meetings and the written material. Goals for teaching are set at the meeting on the

basis of the pupil's level of attainment. Parents receive written minutes of the meeting. Together with other material, this comprises the basis for the next development meeting.

Renewal of the Folkeskole leaving examination

- It is recommended that the Folkeskole leaving examination be modernised and organised so that it much better reflects the daily teaching and the demands pupils will face in education and at work after their time at school. This involves opening possibilities for group examinations.

A local school with independent leaders and school board

- It is recommended that an individual school unify the building and geographical area in which it is located.

Recruitment, retention and development of leaders and staff

Recruitment, retention and development of leaders

- It is recommended that school leaders are secured the possibility to execute pedagogical and administrative tasks at the school.
- It is recommended that documentation and administration support leaders' opportunities for ensuring the best possible teaching.
- It is recommended that leaders are able to delegate tasks to staff.
- It is recommended that school leaders, in cooperation with their immediate superiors, prepare personal competence development plans.
- It is recommended that school leaders are offered continuing training programmes as part of ongoing competence development.
- It is recommended that municipalities introduce and utilise mentor schemes for leaders.
- It is recommended that leaders' superiors deal with leaders' health and safety issues.
- It is recommended that initiatives for pre-leaders be rendered high priority in municipalities and by training course providers.
- It is recommended that allocation of competencies between the different management levels be clarified.
- It is recommended that all leaders be secured relevant leader training.

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