

UNDERSTANDING THE DEMAND FOR SCHOOLING

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Analysing and Understanding the “Demand for Schooling”

Country Report Denmark

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This report was prepared by KLEO/CVU Copenhagen & North Zealand and does not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the Danish Ministry of Education.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Content of the Report

With “Demand for Schooling”, the focus is on the involvement of the demand side. On this basis, an overall insight into five problems is required:

- How education, school and the demand side appear in political and public debate, and how public debate can be characterised (Chapter 3).
- How various groups of parents view school and how satisfied they are (Chapter 4).
- Participation in local decision-making processes, including who participates, and how much (Chapter 5).
- Pupil expectations, including how satisfied pupils are and what motivates them (Chapter 6).
- The heterogeneity of schools, including school types, the influence of the demand side on the content of education and the values involved (Chapter 7).

As a point of departure it should be noted that “demand side” in a Danish context must be understood in its widest sense. Those articulating demand-interests in the school-sector are not only parents and politicians but a wide range of stakeholders including the labour market. Typically demand side’s interests are expressed through associations who claim to act on behalf of a specified group of stakeholders or a segment of the population. Such associations are provided access to decision-making through hearing in the process of legislation i.e.

- KL - the association of local government,
- DA – the association of employers
- DI – the association of employers in the industrial sector
- LO – the national association of trade unions
- S&S – school and society; the association of parents in school boards
- DSE – association of pupils in Denmark...etc.

Aside from being involved in legislation these organisations often express their views on the school in the ongoing debate along with local associations, sport-clubs and individuals in the media where their views are acknowledged and taken into account at institutional, local and state level – in this sense Denmark might have one of the most demand driven school systems in the OECD area.

1.2. Data Basis and Procedure

The report has been prepared on the basis of interviews with pupils, newspaper articles, home pages, ministerial notes, press releases, reports from the Danish Parliament, survey reports, literature and research results. Moreover, KLEO’s own experience and interpretations on the basis of a number of years’ participation in the area of schools are also included.

A general finding is that pupils, teachers, administrators and researchers acknowledge that there is not adequate knowledge about the questions raised. The data gathering strategy is therefore based on a broader interpretation of the subjects. In some cases, therefore, the report goes beyond the original questions, and there are questions that it has not been possible to answer.

The data material is primarily a selection of available official documents from the Danish Parliament, the Government, ministries, Local Government Denmark (LGDK) (Kommunernes Landsforening (KL)), the Danish Union of Teachers (Danmarks Lærerforening), etc., including the associated home pages.

Chapter 2 The Danish Context

During the 20th century, the Danish welfare state and management of the Danish economy have developed via a process of consensus based on cooperation, pragmatic consensus and division of labour.¹ Danish society has developed as an economy of negotiation, one of the results of which has been that it can be difficult to see the difference between different periods of government as all governing parties support the welfare state and currently also support reforms within the public sector.

This also applies to the field of education, in particular basic general education, which consists primarily of Folkeskolen (primary and lower secondary education), the pupils of which account for 87% of all pupils. The Danish “Act on the Folkeskole” has been amended and developed via broad political compromises up to the start of the 21st century, and the existing act from 1993 was adopted with broad support in the Danish Parliament. The Folkeskole Act is a framework act which the school-owners, the municipalities, have to implement. Municipal autonomy and a long tradition of involving parents in the development of the education system and the daily life of schools mean that the legislation may be implemented differently in different municipalities and schools. On the other hand, the national rooting of Folkeskolen, professional training of teachers and the teachers’ union create a traditional, implicit understanding on the basis of which most teachers have taught and therefore nearly all pupils have been taught.

In recent decades, however, there has been talk of a change towards:

- Increased decentralised management of Folkeskolen with goal and framework management as management instruments
- Increased municipal responsibility for Folkeskolen
- Increased municipal flexibility in the provision of Folkeskolen
- Increased influence by/involvement of parents and users

This development reflects pressure for increased parental influence and means that the schools’ boards of governors are given powers to set the principles for the activities of the schools, for example. Increased State focus on the quality of Folkeskolen triggered a number of amendments to the Danish Folkeskolen Act in 2003, including provisions on centrally fixed stage goals for pupils’ skills. Focus on parents’ and pupils’ requirements has also initiated discussion on the options open to citizens. For example, several municipalities have made it possible for parents to choose schools other than the district school, and opportunities to choose schools outside municipal borders are also being considered.²

The changes should also be seen as an attempt at state level to focus on out-puts and out-comes, enhance transparency and quality development and still maintain a highly decentralized system.

¹ Klausen, Kurt Klaudi (2001), *Skulle det være noget særligt?* Børsens Forlag A/S

² Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health (2004). *Strukturkommissionen – sektorkapitler (Structural Commission – Sector Chapters)*

Chapter 3 The Demand Perspective in the Development of Danish Schools

3.1. What is the Content of the Current Schools Debate - and What Part Does Demand Play?

In its strategy for development of the public sector, the current liberal-conservative Government intends to make the public sector more transparent and responsive to citizens and companies, among other things via freedom of choice and the publication of marks.

There are nuances in the interpretation of overall goals and disagreement about the means. Nevertheless, the development can be seen as the continuation of a process that governments led by social democrats have also supported in their efforts to create a more responsive public system. There is political agreement that good contact between users, citizens and the public institutions is natural and useful and that further development is desirable.

Within the public system there is also agreement that responsiveness is useful, among other things to involve citizens and users in an evaluation of public services. The Government and the municipalities thus agree that there is a need to increase the use of user surveys and comparable user information on municipal service areas³.

However, there are other problems in the debate on schools.

The ideas about increased responsiveness do not play a primary role in the debate on school policy at either political, administrative or teacher level. The demand perspective is present indirectly.

The current school policy debate (and the debate of previous years) is dominated by the PISA survey and right now by the OECD's just-published evaluation of the Danish basic general education system and the amendments to Acts implemented by the present Government partly on the basis of the survey and the evaluation. The PISA2000 results have confirmed what had already been disclosed by earlier surveys that Danish pupils have moderate performances in reading literacy and performances in science clearly below OECD-average. Given the fact that the schools in Denmark are overall – in terms of teacher student ratio, learning materials, ICT, buildings etc. - generously funded and among the most costly in the OECD-context these indicators pointing so clearly to a general underachievement in the Danish schools are politically intolerable. A generous and yet - from a school-manager's point of view - inflexible contract regulating and organising the teachers' working hours has been a topic in the debate. However the contract is negotiated and settled between the association of teachers and the association of local government according to traditional schemes for regulation and negotiation of the Danish labour market. These schemes deliberately keep regulation and negotiations of that kind outside the political domain of the parliament leaving all these topics to be settled between employers and employees themselves. This disables the minister of education to intervene in the teachers' contract without challenging the entire scheme for regulation of the labour market in general. Thus the school policy debate revolves around the following fields:

- Increased focus on academic performance
- Elasticity and differentiation in teaching

³ Danish Ministry of Finance (2002). Aftaler om den kommunale økonomi for 2003 (Agreements on the Municipal Economy for 2003).

- Flexible organisation
- Readiness for school
- Increased focus on results and evaluation

The requirements for increased focus on academic performance and the focus on results and evaluation are primarily designed to increase the academic quality of Folkeskolen.

With the introduction of stage goals and final goals, the Government is expressing a desire to give pupils and parents an overview of where education should lead. This is intended to give parents the opportunity to follow their children's education and a better basis for a dialogue between school and home. One interpretation of this by political parties outside the coalition behind the school-act is that parents are now being assigned an inspection function and this will have a negative impact on the cooperation between school and home.

According to LGDK, the focus on results and evaluation also involves several perspectives that can be said to contain responsive elements: "There are at least three important reasons for the major political interest in and focus on results. The first is probably the huge social significance of teachers and basic general education for the development of competitiveness in a knowledge-based society. Follow-up is "from the top down" and the aim is primarily to check that the job is being done...

The second is the very great interest of parents as users, who require information on what schools offer and what children learn. Each institution has to document its results and perhaps compare itself to others or undergo an external assessment.

The third reason is a professional interest in getting better at doing tasks or searching for ways of doing tasks so that the results are better. Follow-up is typically "from the bottom up", and the aim is primarily to learn."⁴

The concerns aired in the debate are that Folkeskolen must get better at meeting the requirements of globalisation and a knowledge-based society, but without compromising on the individual and social skills that everyone agrees are the hallmark of the Danish Folkeskole. The Confederation of Danish Industries' (Dansk Industri (DI)) discussion paper of 2002 on the future of Folkeskolen⁵ states that there must be a focus on a balance of skills. DI considers that many workers do not have the combination of vocational and personal qualifications required to meet the interests of the individual and society.

Summary

Responsiveness is seldom mentioned directly as a goal. It seems instead to be embedded in other more dominant programmes, for example on:

- the public sector's general development, including development in efficiency and quality and decentralisation
- increased focus on academic performance and increased focus on results and evaluation in Folkeskolen

This does not mean that there is not a responsive element in the intention but that the programmes in question are implemented primarily for other reasons.

⁴ www.kl.dk

⁵ www.di.dk

3.2. What Characterises the Public Debate about Schools?

The school policy debate in Denmark is wide, nuanced and diverse. There are no collected, systematically performed analyses of public debate about schools. The following has therefore been written in hypothesis form on the basis of knowledge of the debate about Folkeskolen.

As stated above, there is a wide debate about basic general education with ramification on the supply and demand sides.

The following participate on the school (supply) side:

Government, Parliament and the Ministry of Education, Individual municipalities and Local Government Denmark, Individual teachers and the Danish Union of Teachers, plus head teachers and various head teacher associations.

The following participate on the demand side:

Individual parents, members of boards of governors of schools and the National Association of Schoolparents (Skole og samfund).

Individual pupils and the national pupils' association "Danske skoleelever".

Buyers: Representatives of youth education institutions and trade and industry, in particular in the Confederation of Danish Industries (employers' organisation)

And as mentioned above a wide range of associations and individuals who expresses views and attitudes to the school at local as well as national level.

Every local newspaper follows the development of local schools and school copy is given regular space in all national media. In particular in connection with the publication of surveys, both pupils and parents are interviewed. It is typical for surveys to set the agenda.

Another typical feature is that the institutional players organise their activities to a greater degree with an eye to international surveys and the other institutional players. The publication of announcements *is coordinated* with the results of surveys and any proposals by other players. Many see a trend towards the same researchers commenting on surveys and other input in the debate again and again, which is regarded as a narrowing of the breadth of interpretation in the debate.

Part of the Danish consensus model is thus institutional organisations that organise the parties and, a long way down the road, also the dialogue between the parties. This makes it difficult for the demand side to assert itself seriously in the debate.

There is one agenda that everyone wants to dominate

The most characteristic feature of the Danish debate on schools is perhaps that there is one debate, one agenda, that all the players in the field of school policy are involved in and focus on, Folkeskolen. Almost everyone attended Folkeskolen and municipal Folkeskolen pupils still make up 85% of each year of pupils. Folkeskolen belongs to everyone.

- All the parties see themselves as central players. Participating in the management of Folkeskolen is a high priority.
- All the parties refer to the joint responsibility and mention subjects, problems and solutions on which they agree (for example the need for quality development, an evaluation culture, development of management), while also stressing where they disagree, for example on central tests, challenges facing individual pupils (see also Chapter 7).

All debaters maintain that Folkeskolen must be for all. The establishment of several private schools is not seen as a danger signal as many are established when small Folkeskoler are closed. Moreover, many players see private schools as a positive feature of the Danish school tradition which, even though they compete with Folkeskolen, are ascribed significance as a confirmation of Folkeskolen and its values. In recent years, however, concern is often voiced at losing Folkeskolen for all.

The PISA survey and, more recently, the OECD survey of the Danish basic general education system (June 2004) illustrated that Folkeskolen is not, despite intentions to the contrary, very good at fighting the effects of the situation of underprivileged pupils (called the “negative social heritage” in the public debate). At the same time, some debaters are concerned at how free choice of schools may affect the perception of Folkeskolen as a place in which basic socialisation takes place. LGDK urges level-headedness and calls for the maintenance of the consensus model – a school for all. LGDK sees danger in Folkeskolen becoming an ideological battleground⁶.

In summary, it can be said that one agenda can be regarded as a strength as the parties are kept together around one table and must agree. It can also be regarded as a weakness that sets the limits of development potential.

Recently, several people have expressed concern about the idea of one school for all. And the most recent Folkeskolen settlement in 2003 was adopted with a narrower majority than previously. The central players seem to be recoiling from what the Danish Economic Council (Økonomisk Råd) said in its subject report in 2003: “Perhaps it is now time to amend the preamble”⁷. That discussion has come closer but still seems to be politically too risky (see Chapter 7).

The media are gaining importance in themselves

Several point out that the media’s self-interest creates a dynamic. Individual cases can emphasise examples of problems, for example concerning the conditions for very gifted children and bilingual pupils in Folkeskolen. In other cases, the media reporting of concrete projects is given an angle that gives rise to less constructive debates. In the newsletter Mandag Morgen, a head teacher explains how the debate often consists of “hitting each other over the head” with slogans like ‘reform education’ and ‘grammar school education’⁸.

According to the head teacher, the form of the debate may mean that projects have to contend with a bad press even though they test innovative ideas. The chairman of Danske Skoleelever refers to a similar reflection: “For a while, I had the impression that the more Folkeskolen was criticised, the better!” The Confederation of Danish Industries notes the same trend when it says that “Folkeskolen is better than its reputation”.

3.3. What is Society’s View of Education and Folkeskolen?

Education pays

In its subject report on education in 2003, the Danish Economic Council underlines the significance of Danish investment in education. The Council considers that education has a positive economic return. It estimates that at least one quarter of growth in Denmark since 1970 can be attributed to higher education and research.

⁶ www.kl.dk

⁷ www.dors.dk

⁸ The periodical Mandag Morgen no. 18, 2004. Mandag Morgen.

The so-called “Welfare Commission” (Velfærdskommissionen) concludes that education is the all-important development tool and that continuing and further education should also receive investment. Skills development is an increasingly important element in the area of collective agreements. However, at the same time the question of what society gets for its money is being intensified.

An independent analysis institute also considers Folkeskolen to be of central importance when it comes to ensuring growth and prosperity in the future⁹.

Folkeskolen has a role in social integration

Across occupational groups and institutional levels, there is agreement that education is of broad social significance. LGDK expresses most parties’ perception of Folkeskolen when it says: “Folkeskolen is the most significant institution that knits Danish society together, culturally and socially. Folkeskolen is a common world of experience. Nearly all of us know Folkeskolen – we have experienced it ourselves and we know children who are experiencing it today... It is very recognisable in its content and teaching – the many subjects and the ‘Danish educational model’... for most people, Folkeskolen is responsible for the basic knowledge and skills that we have and it forms the basis of many of the social and democratic values that make us who we are”¹⁰.

Evidently, this covers the attitude to Folkeskolen in the population. According to a survey of parents’ attitudes and expectations at the beginning of their children’s schooling in August 2003, parents are ready to deal with Folkeskolen as it is today. According to LGDK, the survey reflects a high degree of agreement about Folkeskolen with few fluctuations in the attitudes to it, regardless of gender, age, occupation, income and location.

The notion of a common Folkeskole as a basis for socialisation for the Danish welfare society places a big responsibility on Folkeskolen. In a time in which common norms and values are disintegrating, Folkeskolen is regarded as the place in which something common can and must still be created. This means that everyone looks at Folkeskolen when new problematic norms and forms of behaviour are expressed. In the Danish Ministry of Education’s survey of expectations and satisfaction in 1997, one teacher puts it like this: “... it is typical that every time a problem is perceived, some politician pops up on TV and says: “we have to do something about this in Folkeskolen”¹¹.

Globalisation sets qualification requirements for Folkeskolen

There is agreement that education, and not least Folkeskolen, should be regarded as a central area in the realignment of Danes to act in a global context. This is reflected in the latest politic settlement on Folkeskolen¹².

⁹ The periodical Mandag Morgen no. 18, 2004. Mandag Morgen.

¹⁰ www.kl.dk

¹¹ Danish Ministry of Education (1997), *Forventningsundersøgelse – folkeskolen i søgelyset (Survey of Expectations - Focus on Folkeskolen)*.

Danish Ministry of Education/PA Consulting Group.

¹² www.uvm.dk

Under the subject ‘national heritage and global future’, the Confederation of Danish Industries, for example, has assigned Folkeskolen a decisive role in giving pupils the knowledge and ability to acquire the new knowledge they require if they are to be winners on the global jobs market.

Teachers also see Folkeskolen in a global perspective, where Folkeskolen must react to new qualification requirements as a result of globalisation and the transition to a ‘knowledge-based and leaning-based society’. The teachers’ conclusion, however, is broader as, in addition to competitiveness and the need for lifelong learning, they also emphasise that Folkeskolen has an equality-promoting task to perform¹³.

Similarly, LGDK says that “... life in a modern knowledge-based society requires the ability relate to your surroundings and also to influence your own life... to develop children’s ability to work with others, their interest in their subjects, their desire to learn and their self-confidence. These are skills that stand out in particular in relation to the requirements of a knowledge-based society¹⁴”.

3.4 Is Society Satisfied with its Folkeskolen?

While the Confederation of Danish Industries recognises the success of Folkeskolen at developing a range of personal and social skills, it takes along with other significant stakeholders like the national trade unions members of parliament etc. a critical attitude to Folkeskolen’s results in respect of vocational qualifications and personal skills such as persistence and independence. As mentioned above the modest results in PISA and before that in TIMSS (1996) and the IEA literacy survey in the beginning of the ‘90s have raised serious concern as far as widespread underachievement and inequity in the Folkeskole is concerned. This concern have reached the limit where profound and visible changes needs to be initiated from national as well as local political level.

However the population is still in general satisfied. There is a general attitude that Folkeskolen mainly achieves its objectives, in particular

- developing pupils’ ability to express themselves
- familiarising pupils with co-determination and co-responsibility
- giving pupils respect for our responsibility for nature and the environment.

There is also broad support among the buyers. The report concludes that where principals of upper secondary education institutions, emphasising that Folkeskolen constitutes:

- a place where people from both different social and different cultural backgrounds come together
- a common reference point for the majority of Danish citizens
- an education system that is for all.

Parents of children attending Folkeskolen were most critical regarding Folkeskolen’s ability to consider all sides of each pupil’s development, while parents of children at private schools were, not surprisingly, more generally critical in respect of all objectives¹⁵.

¹³ www.dlf.dk

¹⁴ www.kl.dk

¹⁵ Danish Ministry of Education (1997), *Forventningsundersøgelse – folkeskolen i søgelyset (Survey of Expectations - Focus on Folkeskolen)*.

Danish Ministry of Education/PA Consulting Group.

Chapter 4 Parents' Expectations and Satisfaction

4.1. How Satisfied are Parents?

The Danish Ministry of Education's survey of expectations in 1997 showed that parents with children at Folkeskolen were more positive in respect of Folkeskolen than parents of children at private schools and the population as a whole. The users were thus more satisfied than citizens in general. At the same time, however, the hopes and wishes for Folkeskolen of parents of children at Folkeskolen were greater than the development they expected to take place.

On the other hand, these parents were more critical regarding Folkeskolen's ability to consider all sides of each pupil's personal development. They had a strong desire for Folkeskolen to get better at individualising teaching on the basis of each pupil.

The parents consider that Folkeskolen creates an environment in which the pupils thrive, but also that Folkeskolen creates little enthusiasm and commitment in its pupils. There is also a widespread perception that Folkeskolen is best suited to pupils in the young age groups and less well suited to older pupils.

With regard to teaching pupils a number of fundamental skills, parents of children at Folkeskole consider that this is done predominantly well, although they hope that Folkeskolen will concentrate more on fundamental reading and arithmetical skills and they also have a clear expectation that this will happen. In addition, the parents also hoped

- that Folkeskolen would provide more specialist teaching and teach pupils with greater differentiation, taking the individual pupils' strong and weak sides into greater consideration
- that individual schools within a municipality would become specialised.

Concerning the background of parents of children at Folkeskolen, the survey showed:

- that parents of children at Folkeskolen with average household income were most positive
- that older parents of children at Folkeskolen, in particular, were positive, while younger parents were predominantly positive, but at a lower level
- that parents of children at Folkeskolen living west of the Great Belt were generally more positive than those east of the Great Belt
- that the lowest level of satisfaction with and expectations of Folkeskolen was to be found in the Copenhagen area
- that parents of children at Folkeskolen who had experience of both Folkeskolen and private schools were less positive in their assessment of Folkeskolen than parents who had experience only of Folkeskolen.

In 2000, the Danish Ministry of Education carried out a new survey of satisfaction among parents of children at Folkeskolen and parents of children at private schools. The survey showed again that parents are generally satisfied with both Folkeskolen and private schools; 75% of parents were satisfied with their children's schools. Across Folkeskolen and private schools, parents are generally very satisfied with the educational content of the schools, to which they also attach great importance. They are most satisfied with

- the dialogue with the teachers
- the proficiency of the teachers
- attention to individual children.

At the same time, however, they consider that there is still a need and space for improvements and development at schools:

- they want better cohesion between day-care centres, schools and recreational arrangements
- more parental involvement
- better consideration for the abilities and needs of individual children
- parents are most dissatisfied with the standard of books and material used in teaching (nearly one in four is dissatisfied, while half are satisfied).

Parents of children at private schools are more satisfied than parents of children at Folkeskolen. More than 50% of parents of children at private schools are very satisfied, compared with 20% of parents of children at Folkeskolen, and almost one in four parents of children at Folkeskolen has considered moving their child to a private school within the last year. Parents of children at private schools are, in particular, more satisfied in areas such as

- adaptation of teaching to the abilities and needs of individual pupils
- the academic requirements made of the pupils
- how the children treat each other
- the number of pupils per class.

In addition to this, the survey gives rise to the same conclusion as in 1997: there is generally more satisfaction with the public sector among users than among non-users. There is a paradox between the high level of user satisfaction and the massive criticism of Folkeskolen in the public debate.

The latest satisfaction survey is from 2002. It was carried out by LGDK and showed that 78% of parents were satisfied or very satisfied with their schools.

4.2. What are Parents' Top Priorities?

In the Danish Ministry of Education's survey in 2000, there are signs of a sharp division between groups of parents. One group is very concerned about academic performance and whether their own child is developed, enjoys interaction and is socially well integrated and the other group is very concerned about whether the school turns the children into whole human beings and good citizens; they are looking for educational holism.

The pattern is that the first group goes straight for private schools, while the other group chooses Folkeskolen. This conclusion is worrying, in so far as it can be interpreted to mean that support for Folkeskolen is associated with the viewpoint that a focus on academic performance is illegitimate.

An LGDK survey from 2003 confirms the trend from 2000, as parents here indicate personal skills ahead of academic ones. The survey, that was carried out to reveal the attitudes to and expectations of Folkeskolen of 'new' parents of children at Folkeskolen, shows that parents consider the five most important skills to be:

- desire to learn
- reading and writing
- social skills
- confidence in one's own potential
- ability to make decisions.

LGDK concludes that parents choose personal skills over academic ones. “Their expectations of Folkeskolen thus continue to contrast with both the media debate and the lack of performance of Folkeskolen in international surveys, as well as with the new Folkeskolen Act’s increased focus on academic performance and binding stage goals in all subjects”. LGDK continues: “On the other hand, it can be said that Folkeskolen meets parents’ expectations to a high degree, as the PISA survey documented. Folkeskole is one of the best educational systems in the world, where its ability to give pupils the desire to learn, cooperation skills, self-confidence, etc., is concerned.”¹⁶

The survey documents that parents are in favour of more flexible organisation of teaching than they remember from their own schooldays. This means a clash with the time-honoured principles of Danish schooling: few, permanent teachers throughout school hours, no streaming, class teaching only. Parents consider that greater flexibility in class and group teaching can ensure greater diversity in the approach to the children and achieve the aim of the teaching. Increased focus on academic performance and an educational system that takes the children’s age and stage of development into consideration require more different adults around each child. According to parents, teams of teachers for groups of children across classes and age groups are a good way of teaching.

Finally, the survey reveals several factors concerning the possibility of following their children’s benefit from the teaching:

- 73% of parents want written reports from teachers
- children’s own participation in evaluations is regarded as essential (for example, via logbooks)
- exams, tests and marks are given low priority as a means of communication between school and home.

Are parents satisfied with the requirements at the school?

The Danish Ministry of Education’s 1997 survey showed that all target groups thought that the requirements made of pupils were too low. This concerned both the requirements made of pupils by teachers and the quantity of homework after school hours.

At the same time, Folkeskolen is perceived at being poor at creating the necessary peace in which pupils can work and at making pupils accustomed to good working discipline. It is probably good at creating an environment in which children thrive but less good at creating enthusiasm and commitment.

4.3. Can the Satisfaction Be Taken Seriously?

The PISA survey documented in 2001 that Danish schools are less able to break down social heredity than the schools in many other OECD countries¹⁷. This conflicts with Denmark’s understanding of itself and gave rise to reflection among all Danish school policy players.

¹⁶ www.kl.dk

¹⁷ Andersen, Annemarie Møller m.fl., (2001), *Forventninger og færdigheder – danske unge i en international sammenligning* (Expectations and Skills – Danish Young People in an International Comparison), AKF; DPU and SFI-Survey

This survey result affords grounds for making a hypothesis that smaller or larger groups of parents of schoolchildren *should* not be satisfied with their schools. School does not balance out the social differences the children bring with them, which should be one of the objectives of Folkeskolen.

The OECD finds the apparently stable, high satisfaction with the Danish basic general education system to be an expression of the characteristic consensus in the Danish system: “The great strength of the Danish system is the feeling of continuity. Virtually everyone, parents, teachers, pupils and the population in general, appears to have agreed on what education is for and the direction it should take.” Conversely, the OECD finds reason to point out a risk of the same consensus: “... there is a risk of laissez-faire and possible complacency. Denmark has a homogeneous, well-educated population and old traditions. This produces a public perception that the system functions well and can almost be left to itself”¹⁸.

According to the OECD, this could point to a need for Danish school pupils’ results to be compared with international standards to a greater extent. According to the OECD, there are risks associated with relying on subjective assessments, including those by parents: “Most parents want their children to be happy and if they are happy, the parents may be less inclined to complain about the lack of intellectual challenges”¹⁹.

4.4. Summary

- Folkeskolen enjoys general support in society, both in the population and with youth education institutions and trade and industry, even though all parties also formulate wishes for Folkeskolen’s development. In addition to this, the closer people are to the school, the more positive they are. Parents of children at Folkeskole are therefore the most positive about Folkeskolen.
- The parents prioritise personal and social skills highly – higher than academic skills. Parents would like to see a greater focus on academic performance and teaching based on individual children, but this must not take place at the cost of ‘traditional’ Folkeskole values.
- There is reason to investigate the criteria for parents’ satisfaction further, not least among socially disadvantaged parents. It is remarkable that there is not more knowledge about this area.

Chapter 5 Participation in Decision-making Processes at School

5.1. Scope of Parents' Influence

The OECD’s survey of the Danish educational system concludes that parents play an essential role in Folkeskolen, which is emphasised in the preamble to the Folkeskolen Act: “Folkeskolen’s task is, in cooperation with parents, to promote pupils’ acquisition of knowledge, skills, working methods

¹⁸Danish Ministry of Education (2004), OECD-rapport om grundskolen i Danmark (OECD Report on the Basic General Education System in Denmark) – 2004 – National Education Authority’s (Uddannelsesstyrelsen) subject booklet series no. 5 – 2004

¹⁹ Danish Ministry of Education (2004), OECD-rapport om grundskolen i Danmark (OECD Report on the Basic General Education System in Denmark) – 2004 – This from the OECD originates from 1997. National Education Authority’s (Uddannelsesstyrelsen) subject booklet series no. 5 – 2004

and forms of expression that contribute to each pupil's all-round personal development" – and "Pupils and parents cooperate with the school to achieve Folkeskolen's objectives"²⁰.

An evaluation of the project "Folkeskolen Year 2000" – a joint project launched by The Ministry of Education, The Association of Local Government and the Teacher's Union also points to these formulations, which, according to the evaluation, place parents in a new, more active role than previously. However, the perception is that the extended parental commitment is more than a reflection of general development trends in society (democratisation, user influence, freedom of choice, etc)²¹.

In connection with the recently concluded work of the so-called 'Structural commission', brief descriptions of the scope of user influence on Folkeskolen were prepared, including parents' influence. The following is based primarily on these descriptions.

The Folkeskolen Act indicates the main areas in which users have influence on Folkeskolen. The principal rule is that citizen contact and user influence are ensured via:

- The direct influence that the primary users, the pupils, have, among other things via pupil representation on boards of governors of schools and via pupil council work
- The direct, determining influence that parents have in the work on boards of governors of schools, and finally
- The indirect influence of citizens, exerted by the municipal council, with a mandate from the citizens in municipal elections, setting the local framework for Folkeskolen activities.²²

The Folkeskole legislation gives the municipal council wide powers to organise the municipal educational system according to local requirements. The division of responsibility for Folkeskolen is based on a historical development that is an expression of the desire to involve municipal councils and parents in the management of Folkeskolen's activities, while the Danish Parliament sets the national goals and framework for Folkeskolen's activities.

With the amendment to the Act in 1989, boards of governors of schools were created with a majority of members elected by parents. The purpose of this was partly:

- To promote goal and framework management instead of detail management in the municipalities
- To increase economic and educational self-management
- To increase parental influence via direct influence on the board of governors²³

The board of governors of a school consists of 5 or 7 representatives of parents, elected by and from among persons who have parental responsibility for children who are enrolled in the school. There are also two representatives elected by and from among the school's employees and two representatives of the pupils. [...] The school's head teacher and his/her deputy are appointed to the board of governors without voting rights and are responsible for performing the function of secretary.

²⁰ Danish Ministry of Education (2003) – Consolidation Act no. 870 of 21 October of the Act relating to Folkeskolen.

²¹ AFK m.fl.: Evaluering af F2000 (Evaluation of F2000).

²² Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health (2004), Structural Commission, *Undervisningsministeriets sektoranalyse af folkeskoleområdet* (The Danish Ministry of Education's Sector Analysis of the Folkeskolen Area).

²³ Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health (2004), Structural Commission, *Undervisningsministeriets sektoranalyse af folkeskoleområdet* (The Danish Ministry of Education's Sector Analysis of the Folkeskolen Area).

The board of governors of a school is responsible for setting out the principles for the activities of the school. It approves the budget and supervises the teaching, the cooperation between school and home, the division of labour between the teachers, the purchase of teaching materials and the school's rules, the optional subjects offered by the school, special teaching, etc.²⁴

5.2. Parents' Participation in Everyday Life

How involved are parents?

The Danish Ministry of Education's survey from 2001²⁵ documents that parents are very committed to their children's schooling. On average, a parent spends 3 hours a month at their child's school (excl. extra tuition), and, according to their replies in the survey, they are willing to spend 50% more time.

Parents participate actively in many different ways:

The most important are: Participation in parent-teacher meetings (95%), reading newsletters (93%), participation in school/home conversations (88%).

Next most important: Reading annual plans (75%), holding informal conversations (72%), telephone contact (55%), practical matters (54%).

At the other end of the spectrum is participation in the school's formulation of academic and educational objectives, for example in the form of participation in board of governors work, committee work, educational/academic days or preparation of parent-teacher meetings.

Approximately 25% said that they participate in these activities.

An evaluation from 2000 shows that the dialogue on individual children is very typical²⁶.

In a more recent survey from 2003, parents were asked about their expectations of themselves in connection with their children's schooling. The parents' replies confirm their high commitment and show that parents are happy to contribute by:

- helping their children with schoolwork
- helping to ensure that their children go to school rested
- supporting the teacher
- participating in parent cooperation
- entering into agreements with the school on their children's development.

What is most important in school/home cooperation – and how satisfied are parents?

In 2000, an evaluation of school/home cooperation in connection with a large two-year national development programme for Folkeskolen²⁷ showed that parents prioritise the following fields most highly in school/home cooperation:

1. good contact and communication
 - a. open, honest dialogue
 - b. close contact via conversations, board of governors, etc.

²⁴Danish Ministry of Education (2004), OECD-rapport om grundskolen i Danmark (OECD Report on the Basic General Education System in Denmark) – 2004 –

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²⁵ A survey carried out by the independent company Gallup as a telephone-interview. www.uvm.dk

²⁶ Mehlbye, Jill m.fl. (2000) *Midtvejsevalueringen F2000 (Midway Evaluation F2000)*. AKF.

²⁷ Folkeskolen år 2000 (Folkeskolen in 2000) – a cooperation project between the Danish Ministry of Education, LGDK and the Danish Union of Teachers (DLF).

- c. a real reply from the school and time to talk
 - d. the more information and openness from both parties the better
 - e. personal contact with teachers
2. joint influence when crucial decisions are to be taken in class
- a. problems, educational work and plans

The Danish Ministry of Education's survey from 2001 confirms this image, as the parents rank the most important elements in their contact with the school as follows:

Openness by the school/teachers 42%

Good information 18%

Child's well-being 11%

Smooth cooperation 9%

Involvement in the event of problems 8%

Good contact with class teacher 8%

The above data clearly shows that parents want a dialogue, openness and information from the school. The same situation was portrayed in 2000, when the evaluation of the national F2000 project showed that parents appreciate the improved opportunities for this dialogue via

- parent-teacher meetings, which they find have become more dialogue-oriented and involve discussions between parents and school
- school/home conversations, in which a pupil, his/her parents and his/her teacher jointly discuss the pupil's schooling.

The evaluation formulates a hypothesis that the close cooperation in the school/home conversations expresses a modern perception of the learning situation as a joint project for the three parties (pupil, parents, teacher), but with the independent child in the centre.

Another conclusion is that the involvement of parents continues just to cover the pupils' social life, while academic aspects are left to the teachers. Parents want to be informed, but they do not want to be involved²⁸. One of the parents' reasons for this is that increased parental influence, for instance 24 different parents each having an influence on teaching, would make things more uncertain, as well as confidence that the teacher is doing things roughly right.

The Danish Ministry of Education's survey from 2001 shows that 81% are satisfied with their cooperation with the school. Only 7% are dissatisfied. Satisfaction is slightly higher in the smallest classes.

However, 40% think that schools can ask more of parents than they do today. Nearly all (85%) of parents think that they have a responsibility to become involved in how the class functions as a whole, i.e. not just their own child, but the class as a whole. Only 12% think that this is the school's responsibility. Slightly more women think this than men. 60% think that they are involved in the crucial decisions concerning their children's schooling. 40% are non-committal and want closer cooperation. 20% say directly that they do not think they are continuously involved in crucial decisions and are therefore dissatisfied with the school/home cooperation.

New parents – troublesome or rewarding?

²⁸Mehlbye, Jill m.fl. (2000) *Slutevalueringen F2000 (Evaluation F2000)*. AKF

In connection with several surveys, a much-discussed phenomenon is documented, namely 'new parents' and the problems cooperation between them and schools can entail. The surveys give reason to indicate several problems:

- Some parents approach schools with a user culture instead of a citizen culture. They take from schools what they need instead of taking the whole package²⁹.
- Same parents are decreasingly aware of their responsibility for and role in preparing and bringing up their children. The perception is that some parents dote on and individualise their children to a degree that makes it hard for the teachers to do their work. Other parents are too busy and leave more and more of their children's upbringing to schools³⁰.
- Some parents are considered troublesome by teachers. These parents feel that the schools lack the will to be transparent, which may partly be because Folkeskolen has been subject to a lot of criticism³¹.
- The fourth type are parents who 'resign' from school/home cooperation because they ostensibly feel inferior to the other parents. This group may be socially and culturally excluded and be hard to establish contact with³².

5.3. Parents' Participation in the Development of Schools (Governance)

Danish parents have good opportunities to influence the development of their children's schools. The OECD concludes, in its evaluation of Danish schools, that "parent power seems to be a reality in Denmark"³³.

How is participation in boards of governors?

The Structural Commission reports that the difference between small and large municipalities is minimal, but the interest in boards of governors is slightly greater in small municipalities than in large municipalities. Participation in elections is also slightly higher in small municipalities. However, any socioeconomic differences are not known.

The National Association of Schoolparents surveyed participation in elections in connection with elections to boards of governors in 2002.

Participation in elections to boards of governors in 2002³⁴

	1990	1994	1998	2002
Proportion of contested elections	43%	23%	17%	14%
Average turnout	43%	39%	36%	31%

²⁹ Mehlbye, Jill m.fl. (2000) *Slutevalueringen F2000 (Evaluation F2000)*. AKF

³⁰ Danish Ministry of Education (1997), *Forventningsundersøgelse – folkeskolen i søgelyset (Survey of Expectations - Focus on Folkeskolen)*.

Danish Ministry of Education/PA Consulting Group.

³¹ Mehlbye, Jill m.fl. (2000) *Midtvejsevalueringen F2000 (Midway Evaluation F2000)*. AKF.

³² Mehlbye, Jill m.fl. (2000) *Midtvejsevalueringen F2000 (Midway Evaluation F2000)*. AKF.

³³ Danish Ministry of Education (2004), *OECD-rapport om grundskolen i Danmark (OECD Report on the Basic General Education System in Denmark) – 2004 –*

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³⁴ www.skole-samfund.dk

in contested elections				
Proportion of consensus elections	57%	77%	83%	86%

The survey shows two very clear trends:

- The turnout in elections to boards of governors fell consistently for each 4-year period
- The proportion of contested elections fell consistently for each 4-year period

The overall image gives reason to formulate a hypothesis that fewer and fewer people ascribe importance to boards of governors. The National Association of Schoolparents' survey also illustrates the distribution of candidates:

Candidates in elections to boards of governors in 2002

Men	43%
Women	49%
Gender not stated	4%
Standing for re-election	25%
Self-employed	9%
Private employees	29%
Public employees	26%
Others (students, pensioners, etc.)	7%
Occupation not stated	28%

Among other things, the survey indicates that:

- The proportions of women and men are virtually equal in board of governors work
- The group of private employees/self-employed participates to a greater degree in board of governors work than public employees
- Only one in four members stands for re-election for a new term on the board of governors.

Participation of bilingual parents

The National Association of Schoolparents also surveyed the participation of bilingual parents in formalised school/home cooperation³⁵.

The survey showed that bilingual parents have an overall participation in board of governors work of 3.3% after schools with no bilingual pupils have been removed. This means they are very underrepresented as 9.3% of Folkeskole pupils are bilingual. The boards of governors containing bilingual members are unevenly distributed between schools. Most have just one bilingual member but a small number have many (up to 7) bilingual members. However, the results of the survey show no automatic link between the proportion of bilingual pupils and the proportion of bilingual parents on the board of governors.

What are the prospects for parents' participation in board of governors work?

³⁵ www.skole-samfund.dk

The evaluation of the project Folkeskolen year 2000 showed that there are two types of board of governors, one in which the parties regard the board of governors as a cooperation and dialogue body between parents and teachers, and another in which the board of governors is an arena for political fighting between interest groups.

In both cases, a number of problems can arise:

- A majority of parents and a minority of teachers gives the board of governors low legitimacy among teachers. The parents typically perceive the board of governors as a cooperation body. The teachers see it as a body for party interests.
- Delegated powers from the municipality but central budgeting produces a feeling of powerlessness.
- There may be a perception that board of governors work has most influence on buildings and resources, while parents would prefer to influence their children's well-being and the academic content of the teaching.
- What do principles mean for a school's activities? The powers of a board of governors are hard to interpret.
- Is each parent his or her own agent or a representative of the other parents at the school?
- Increased parental influence can easily cross the border of what teachers see as their own preserve and can easily be perceived as criticism/suspicion.
- Some boards of governors experience a lack of respect from the local education authority.

The survey also indicates the benefits of developing school/home cooperation: "Continued development of cooperation between school and parents seems necessary for several reasons. Teachers are increasingly dependent on the positive support of parents around the class as a social unit, not least in order to counter the undermining effect of some parents' increasing focus on their own children's learning. As Folkeskolen develops, parents will encounter ever increasing requirements for cooperation and thus for adaptation to common values and goals. Both teachers and parents must get used to the new roles. In this connection, it is important that the greater parental commitment is given space to develop. Parents must be given the opportunity to see that their active commitment has a role to play. At the same time, the teacher will still ultimately have the professional responsibility for ensuring that teaching takes place satisfactorily. There seems to be untapped potential in continued work on attitudes with the aim of promoting the idea of cooperation and impeding partisan behaviour"³⁶.

In accordance with this, the parties to the settlement and LGDK considered that parents' participation in their children's school life should be developed. With the development programme "School in Motion" (En skole i bevægelse), research and development studies are currently being initiated which, on the basis of local interests and needs, will identify new opportunities for active involvement and participation of parents in the activities of schools.

5.4. Summary

The majority of parents are involved in their children's schooling, and most are satisfied. Parents want to have close contact with schools and be well-informed and also take co-responsibility for and influence the social life in class and at school. However, among parents and teachers there

³⁶ Mehlbye, Jill m.fl. (2000) *Midtvejsevalueringen F2000 (Midway Evaluation F2000)*. AKF.

seems to be agreement that teachers are responsible for teaching and the academic content, and both parties also think that that is the way it should be.

Small groups of parents are not as described above. In some cases, this is because they want greater influence on teaching as well, which may cause conflict with teachers. In other cases, this is because they soon reject a school if they are dissatisfied. For others again, this is because they are unable to maintain close contact on account of their overall life situation.

Parents are offered influence via boards of governors, but participation is declining. The real influence of the board of governors depends entirely on local practice between parents, schools and municipalities. The question is whether declining involvement leads to declining influence or whether involvement is declining because influence is limited.

Parents' view of the most important task of schools is constant over time: Pupils must be prepared for life and not just for the labour market. They welcome an increased focus on vocational qualifications and results, but this must not be at the expense of pupils' development of personal and social skills.

Chapter 6 Pupils' Expectations and Values

6.1. Legislation and Rules

The Structural Commission's sector analysis describes how Folkeskole pupils exert influence in Folkeskolen on three levels:

- The pupils are guaranteed direct influence on the teaching itself via the Folkeskolen Act's provisions that the establishment of ways of working and methods and the choice of material must take place as far as possible in cooperation between teachers and pupils, cf. Section 16 of the Folkeskolen Act. In addition to this, a number of provisions guarantee pupils' involvement in decisions of individual significance, for example teaching in optional and elective subjects, year 10, special teaching, etc.
- If a school has year 5 or higher pupils, the pupils may form a pupils' council, cf. Section 46 of the Folkeskolen Act. In schools with younger pupils, the pupils may only state a desire to establish a pupils' council.
- Finally, pupils are represented on the school's board of governors (see Chapter 5).

6.2. What is Pupils' View of School?

There are no surveys of Danish pupils' view of school. However, an indication of pupils' view of school can be gained from the attitude of the national pupils' interest group 'Danske Skoleelever'. The main elements of the organisation's programme of principles are reproduced in the following.

Danske Skoleelever's programme of principles³⁷:

“At Danske Skoleelever, we think school must be for everyone. Whoever you are, school must be a nice place to go. There must be room for our diversity, both personal diversity and the diversity of subjects we study. The teaching must be exciting for us all, regardless of our ability. We think that co-determination must be prioritised in the basic general education system. Parents and, not least,

³⁷www.skoleelever.dk

pupils must be consulted. We pupils must have more influence on our own everyday lives - what we want to be and how we want to learn it.

School must treat us as what we are – human beings. In addition to all the academic skills school must teach us, it must also prepare us for democracy, health and community so that we leave the basic general education system with both the academic and human skills we will need later in our lives.

On the basis of the above, we will fight to achieve the following values:

- A school that gives pupils an understanding of and commitment to democracy
- Teaching that takes all pupils into account
- Evaluation methods that are a tool to help each pupil improve his or her own performance
- A school with a good teaching environment
- A school that takes responsibility for pupils' personal development
- A school with room for everyone
- An open school with cooperation between pupils, school and parents
- Teaching that makes sense to the pupils.”

Pupils emphasise the same core values as teachers and politicians: a common Folkeskole, personal development of individual pupils, academic performance and, not least, equal, significant dialogue between pupils, teachers and parents.

6.3. What Do Pupils See as Being Most Important in Their Schooling?

Denmark has a so-called Children's Council (Børneråd), the task of which is to focus on children's rights. Among other activities, the Children's Council holds a dialogue with children and young people about everyday problems, including schooling.

In connection with the annual meeting in 2002, a dialogue was held between children and adults³⁸ which isolated four factors at school that children would like more of. In addition to friends and colleagues, and a good physical and mental environment, these were:

- Good teachers
- Alternative education methods

The children's replies tally well with the attitudes of parents in the survey of expectations in 1997. In that survey, the parents indicated the following factors as the most important for children's benefit from teaching:

- my child must be motivated
- there must be a feeling of community among the children
- the teacher must be committed
- the teacher's educational skills
- the children in the class must be motivated.

³⁸ Children's Council (Børnerådet) (2003), *Dialog på tværs – børn og voksne i øjenhøjde (Cross Dialogue – Children and Adults at Eye Level)*. Annual Meeting of the Children's Council 2002. Children's Council.

6.4. Pupils' Assessment of their Co-determination

In connection with the Danish Power Report (Magtudredning), Professor Bo Jacobsen et al. carried out an extensive, representative survey of pupil democracy in Folkeskolen³⁹. The following is based to a great extent on this survey, which identifies:

- pupils' general experience of democracy, i.e. their experience of developing as individuals and being part of a community, plus
- pupils' specific experience of democracy, i.e. their experience of concrete co-determination in class and at school.

Pupils' general experience of democracy

Regarding individuality at Folkeskolen, the democracy survey shows that:

- pupils widely feel that they can be themselves at Folkeskolen; 8 out of 10 feel that they are able to be themselves in class. Pupils have experience of expressing their individuality at Folkeskolen and acquire a foundation in democratic practice that is central to a liberal outlook. At the same time, the pupils state that they find this aspect of democracy absolutely essential. Up through the years, pupils feel that they can develop their individuality increasingly and they also increasingly attach importance to this.
- pupils feel they have good opportunities to express their opinions; 8 out of 10 pupils think that they are able to express their opinions, even if they disagree with the teacher or other pupils in the class. The good opportunities increase as they progress through school.

Regarding community at Folkeskolen, the survey shows that:

- pupils feel that there is a good feeling of class community (86%). The importance of a good feeling of community is confirmed by pupils emphasising the essential importance that community would have if they had to change to a new class.⁴⁰
- 8% say they are not included; this is equivalent to 1-2 pupils per class.
- over half of pupils state that bullying takes place in their class. Bullying does not decrease as pupils progress through school.
- 75% feel that they are good at working together in class. The pupils also indicate that discussion of disagreements makes a positive contribution to the discussion culture.
- 50% experience good responsiveness, although they find it harder to work together, discuss and listen in the older years.

A large representative survey of around 1200 pupils from year 6 carried out by the Children's Council confirms the image that the majority of pupils thrive at Folkeskolen. However, the survey also shows that 20% of pupils are often or always afraid to express their opinions out loud in class. Making their voice heard, standing for the pupils' council or just saying when everything gets too much will often be impossible for these children; they already find school too confusing in many ways⁴¹.

Pupils' specific experience of democracy

Regarding co-determination in *class*, the democracy survey shows that:

³⁹ Jacobsen, Bo, et al. (2004) *Den vordende demokrat (The Future Democrat)*. Magtudredningen (Power Report). Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

⁴¹ Children's Council (2002), *Medbestemmelse i folkeskolen (Co-determination at Folkeskolen)*. Children's Council.

- pupils have varying experiences of their influence. In relation to co-determination, the teacher and the school play central roles, as the democratic process requires practical skills, which pupils must acquire as they are developed.
- pupils' opinions are split when it comes to the legitimacy of co-determination in decisions concerning the academic content of lessons. Some pupils say that they do not consider it to be desirable to be involved in decisions concerning teaching as such involvement would just obstruct effective learning. However, there are also pupils who take a very positive view of having influence on teaching. They state that the involvement of pupils both instils a feeling of responsibility and is motivating in terms of the content of teaching for each pupil.
- The majority state that they are unable to change how they are taught. Only just under a third feel that they often have influence on teaching.

The above survey by the Children's Council shows a more unambiguous image with regard to pupils' will to participate in decisions on the form and content of their teaching and to take co-responsibility for whether they learn anything at school. The conclusion is that pupils want to take responsibility but that it is necessary for co-determination to be made meaningful for children. There is an indication of a connection between a person's control over his or her situation and the possible forms of learning. However, such meaningful co-determination seems not to be widespread in the concrete teaching, as:

- 54% of pupils are never or seldom involved in planning their own work plan
- 90% of pupils never or seldom have the opportunity to choose the books or booklets with which they will work
- 58% of pupils are never or seldom involved in choosing topics.

Regarding co-determination *at school*, the democracy survey shows that:

- in the democracy at school as a whole, the central body the pupils' council, the formal democratic body of the pupils, is supposed to ensure that pupils have joint influence on the organisation of their everyday lives.
- 75% consider that the pupils' council is important or very important for the school (the proportion decreases up through the years). However, the pupils' council does not mean much to individual pupils. 64% of pupils feel that the pupils' council has little importance for them, and this proportion increases in the older years. Although a large majority considers that the pupils' council is important for the school, it does not mean much to individual pupils personally.
- As justification for the scepticism pupils express in relation to the real democratic influence achieved via the pupils' council, pupils state that the pupils' council makes decisions on insignificant matters, the decisions are very protracted or the teachers do not take it seriously.

In relation to pupils' influence on the school, the pupils' organisation confirms that the influence of pupils' councils is limited in many places, or varying at best. In an interview, the chairman of the organisation says: "The influence of the pupils' council depends entirely on the contact teacher. In many cases, a teacher is appointed who has a free period to ensure that he or she has a full timetable. It is rare for a teacher to be appointed who is actually enthusiastic about the council. Schools forget that it is for the good of the school itself. Too often the work of the pupils' council is left solely to the pupils. At model schools, the teachers and administration automatically consider that the pupils' opinions should be heard in connection with major decisions that are directly relevant to them. This is a culture that must be developed."

6.5. Summary

Pupils' view of school seems to tally with that of parents and teachers. However, it is important to emphasise that there are currently no representative surveys of this area.

The great majority of pupils enjoy going to school. However, a minority of pupils are not thriving at school. Pupil influence on teaching seems in practice to depend entirely on the ability and will of individual teachers, while meaningful pupil democracy at school varies greatly from school to school.

A pupil's experience of co-determination and democracy can depend almost entirely on which class or school they end up in.

Chapter 7 The Heterogeneity of Schools and Influence on School Content

7.1. Legislation and Rules⁴²

Children must be taught in Denmark but they do not have to attend school. Section 76 of the Danish Constitution grants the right to free teaching at Folkeskolen but also allows for children to be taught in other ways. Parents may teach children at home, ensuring that they receive an education on a par with that required at Folkeskolen. Home education is very limited in Denmark.

Legislation concerning private independent primary and lower secondary schools

A more widely used alternative to Folkeskolen is free independent primary and lower secondary schools, a parallel school system to Folkeskolen that provides teaching in years 1 to 10. These schools must meet the standards of what is generally required at Folkeskolen and they may be entitled to hold Folkeskolen's final examinations.

If a group of parents wants to establish a private independent school, the following rules apply, among others:

- The regulations, buildings and the payment of a deposit (DKK 30,000) must be approved by the Danish Ministry of Education in the period 1/2 - 1/6??.
- 5/9?? in the first school year, the school must have at least 12 pupils. 5/9?? in the second school year, the school must have at least 20 pupils divided between all years. 5/9?? in the third year, the school must have at least 28 pupils divided between years 1-7⁴³.

Recently, the municipalities expressed a desire for the minimum pupil requirements to be made stricter to ensure better resource utilisation by merging schools. However, this was rejected by the Minister of Education.

The private independent primary and lower secondary schools may have very different basic principles, which are established by the schools themselves. They also evaluate their teaching themselves. The schools are managed by a board of governors with a majority of private individuals, i.e. non-public authorities. The schools have broad frameworks for the organisation of

⁴² This section is based primarily on "Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health (2004), Structural Commission, *Mindre sektoranalyse vedrørende friskoler mv (Small Sector Analysis concerning Private Independent Schools, etc.)*".

⁴³ Interview

teaching in terms of both form and content. There is no requirement that the teaching methods correspond to those used in Folkeskolen.

The schools are supervised by the group of parents and by a supervisor chosen by the parents to supervise the pupils' standards in Danish, arithmetic/mathematics and English and whether, on the basis of an overall assessment, the school's overall teaching meets the standard of what is generally required at Folkeskolen. The supervisor also ensures that the language used to teach is Danish. In the case of international schools, the Ministry of Education may grant permission for other languages to be used for teaching.

Under the legislation, schools are granted an operating subsidy meted out according to pupils per annum, calculated on the basis of the corresponding public expenses at Folkeskolen, less the parents' fee payments, that are currently under 1/5 of public subsidies. This arrangement must be regarded as a political instrument for setting standards in private independent primary and lower secondary schools in relation to Folkeskolen.

7.2. How Many Parents Choose Primary and Lower Secondary Schools Other Than Folkeskolen?

There are around 2120 primary and lower secondary schools in Denmark. Around 1665 are Folkeskoler, 470 are private independent schools and 246 are continuation schools.

There are almost 585,000 pupils at Folkeskolen, which produces an average school size of around 333 pupils. At the private independent schools, the equivalent figure is 176 pupils. Around 5000 Folkeskole pupils attend a Folkeskole outside their home municipality.⁴⁴

Private independent schools in Denmark can roughly be divided into the following categories:

- independent 'Grundtvigian' schools in rural districts
- urban schools with a focus on traditional academic and cultural values
- boarding schools for the older years with diverse orientation i.e. vocational, music etc.
- religious schools or church schools
- small schools based on progressive/ libertarian ideas
- schools with a specific educational objective i.e. Rudolf Steiner schools
- immigrant schools
- German minority schools⁴⁵

The proportion of bilingual pupils is greater at private independent primary and lower secondary schools than at Folkeskolen and has risen over the years. Other than this, there is no knowledge of statements of the distribution between the various types of school.

⁴⁴ Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health (2004). *Strukturkommissionen – sektorkapitler (Structural Commission – Sector Chapters)*. The commission was established in the preparation of a reform of local government that are to be implemented.

⁴⁵ Danish Ministry of Education (2004), OECD-rapport om grundskolen i Danmark (OECD Report on the Basic General Education System in Denmark) – 2004 – National Education Authority's (Uddannelsesstyrelsen) subject booklet series no. 5 – 2004

Private independent primary and lower secondary schools' proportion of total pupil numbers, number of schools, number of pupils and average school size⁴⁶

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Proportion at private independent schools	10.9	11.0	11.1	11.1	11.3	11.4	11.4	11.8	11.8	12.0
Number of schools	409	409	417	418	421	423	425	427	435	440
Average size	164	162	160	161	163	165	167	168	170	173
Number of pupils	67,067	67,123	67,429	67,472	68,420	69,664	70,856	72,391	74,400	76,267

Among older pupils, many go to continuation schools, which are private independent primary and lower secondary schools oriented towards the oldest pupils. In 2000, 36% of year 10 pupils attended a continuation school.

The number of pupils at private independent primary and lower secondary schools is thus relatively stable with a slight, but continuous increase.

Why are private independent primary and lower secondary schools established?

According to a survey from 1997⁴⁷ parents indicate the following motives for choosing private schools instead of Folkeskolen:

- the ability to consider each pupil's needs
- fewer pupils in the classes
- similarity between the school's values and your own values
- well-defined frameworks for what pupils must and may do.

Among parents of children at Folkeskolen and parents of children at private schools, there is also strong agreement that parents of children at private schools do not want to keep their children isolated from the rest of the population.

Summary

Despite the predominant status of Folkeskolen in Danish schooling, there are good opportunities for parents with other preferences, both formally in terms of legislation and realistically in financial terms. The current political signals clearly show that these principles carry heavier weight than financial considerations.

7.3. Is There Freedom to Choose Between Folkeskoler?

Parents have a right to have their children enrolled in the school in the district in which the child lives or resides.

⁴⁶ Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health (2004), Structural Commission, *Undervisningsministeriets sektoranalyse af folkeskoleområdet (The Danish Ministry of Education's Sector Analysis of the Folkeskolen Area)*.

⁴⁷ Danish Ministry of Education (1997), *Forventningsundersøgelse – folkeskolen i søgelyset (Survey of Expectations - Focus on Folkeskolen)*.

Danish Ministry of Education/PA Consulting Group.

To date parents have also had the right to have their children enrolled in a municipal school other than the district school if the school is willing to take the children and this can take place within the framework established by the municipal council. However, the municipal council may decide to offer a free choice of schools, i.e. the parents can choose freely, within the guidelines set out by the municipal council, between district schools and other schools in the municipality. More than 75% of Danish municipalities have stated that the municipality offered a free choice between the district school and other schools in the municipality. The proportion is highest among the large municipalities.

The Danish Ministry of Education's survey from 2001⁴⁸ showed, among other things, that 50% of parents stated that they had not received any information material at all, while just 19% were satisfied with the information.

In contrast to this, a more recent but smaller survey from 2003 shows that the number of rejections of pupils who apply to transfer to a school other than the district school is very limited. The survey shows that:

- approximately 9% of a year of pupils want to go to a school other than the district school
- 86% of requests are granted. In 2 out of 3 municipalities, all transfer requests are granted.
- The majority of rejections are because the municipality has decided on an upper class size that they do not wish to have exceeded by transferring further pupils.⁴⁹

The information work and whether a small or large group of parents indicates in advance that they want to apply for a school other than the district school is not assessed.

To date Folkeskole pupils have not been entitled to choose a Folkeskole in a municipality other than their home municipality, although there are some exceptions. For example, if the school applied for accepts an application to take a pupil from a neighbouring municipality and this school is half as far away as the district school, which must also be at least nine km from the pupil's home. Special voluntary schemes between municipalities can also ensure increased freedom of choice across municipal borders. There is no knowledge of statements of *who* makes use of the freedom of choice.

As stated above, the current Government is working for greater freedom of choice for citizens, but in conjunction with the municipalities, which have the daily responsibility for ensuring a financial balance: "The Government and LGDK agree that citizens must, as far as possible, have more freedom to choose between various public and private services. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that the municipalities are able to manage overall capacity and the overall expenses in the light of freedom of choice"⁵⁰.

There are indications from several quarters of possible problems with a free choice between schools:

⁴⁸ www.uvm.dk

⁴⁹ Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health (2004). *Strukturkommissionens betænkning. Bind tre. Bilag – sektorkapitler (Structural Commission's Report. Volume Three. Appendix – Sector Chapters)*. Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health.

⁵⁰ Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health (2004). *Strukturkommissionens betænkning. Bind tre. Bilag – sektorkapitler (Structural Commission's Report. Volume Three. Appendix – Sector Chapters)*. Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health.

- The evaluation of F2000 indicates a trend that parents are approaching schools as consumers and change schools sooner, which is considered to have a negative effect on school/home cooperation and the possibilities of meeting teaching plans and maintaining the work on the class's social life. For children with problem-free schooling, parents' decisions to change schools frequently may have serious consequences.
- The Danish Union of Teachers and The National Trade Union's Labour-market Council have independently indicated that there is a risk of creating school districts that are socially so unbalanced that free choice for the strongest will be at the expense of the schooling of the weakest. In the PISA survey, this concern appears to be supported. The survey states that ability is 'contagious'. If a child is in a class with many gifted pupils, he or she will be stimulated and thus better than he or she would otherwise have been. Conversely, if a child is in a low standard class, there is a high probability that he or she will not live up to his or her potential ability.
- In 2003, the Danish Economic Council suggested the same problem in its discussion of the publication of schools' marks, which, if they are not corrected statistically for socioeconomic factors, can increase the spread of the level of marks.

A political decision has just been made that freedom of choice across municipal borders will be possible for a trial period of two school years. The political signal therefore seems to be unambiguous. It will be interesting to follow the actual effect of this scheme.

7.4. Do Parents Participate in the Establishment of the Content of and Guidelines for Teaching Plans/Curricula?

Increased central control

The legislation stipulates minimum numbers of lessons for school subjects and the framework for a number of optional subjects as well as the central knowledge and proficiency areas that apply to the subjects, but does not stipulate specific objectives for specific years.

On the basis of recommended curricula prepared by the ministry, the municipalities have, for a number of years, had the opportunity to prepare local curricula for the subjects. However, it is estimated that only a very few municipalities have taken this opportunity and the ministerial recommended curricula have therefore been the curricula actually applied. In recent years, however, the Government have tightened central content-related control supported by a broad majority of parties in the parliament.

In 2002, recommended stage goals were introduced for years 2 and 7, as well as final goals for years 9 and 10. These were binding from August 2003. In continuation of the common goals, the Minister of Education continues to issue recommended curricula with a description of the content of teaching and, as a supplement to the curriculum, recommended material to support the descriptions of the process between the individual stage goals and up to the final goals for the individual subjects, which the municipalities are now under an obligation to prepare.⁵¹ The recommendations also include a description of the pupils' personal, all-round development, teaching in interdisciplinary subjects, etc.

⁵¹ www.uvm.dk

While the Government and settlement parties justify increased central control with the necessity to ensure increased focus on academic performance at Folkeskolen and greater opportunity for parents to follow the benefits of school to their children, the political opposition describes the measures as an expression of lack of confidence in teachers.

Increased parental participation?

The F2000 evaluation's survey of, among other things, parents' influence on the content of teaching indicates that parents' real influence on the content of teaching is limited: "We did not need to talk to too many teachers and parents before it was clear that differentiation [between the academic element and the social element of schooling] is quite clearly present at all levels and asserts itself vigorously. The school/teachers (alone) are responsible for the academic element. There is cooperation on the social element... Essentially, they [the teachers] do not think that parents should have anything to do with the teaching at all. This is the preserve of the teachers. This is where they must show their professionalism"⁵². The survey also showed that parents generally support the teachers' attitude on this point.

In continuation of the above, and on the basis of experience of value debates at a large number of schools, it is estimated that parents' influence is directed primarily at schools' social culture, including the social rules between pupils and between pupils and teachers. One parent puts it like this: "... where the board of governors can really influence things is the entire spirit of the school - what it is like to be there [...] we can contribute to saying 'what it must be like at the school'".

Despite a continuous development of school/home cooperation, parents still have no particular influence on the content of teaching, which, however, they generally seem not to want either!

⁵²Mehlbye, Jill m.fl. (2000) *Midtvejsevalueringen F2000 (Midway Evaluation F2000)*. AKF.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

The present report has been prepared on the basis of a premise that the OECD countries' school systems are in the midst of a development process from traditional to modern schools and that increased responsiveness in relation to the expectations and wishes of the demand side is a central dynamo in this development.

In Denmark, there is a long tradition of dialogue between the parties interested in the school system at national, municipal and school level, not least between teachers, pupils and parents at individual level. Legislation and institutional arrangements ensure that experience is continuously exchanged and politicians, teachers and users negotiate on objectives and priorities.

The Danish model therefore provides the opportunity for responsiveness on various relatively autonomous institutional levels. This produces a dynamic but also complex development that may go in many directions at once. At any rate, various involved parties may, at the same time, have widely differing perceptions of whether responsiveness is increasing or decreasing.

This report can state only that the dialogue between school policy players exists to a high degree. Whether responsiveness and thus the demand side's influence on the Danish school system are increasing or decreasing, we dare not say on the present basis. However, what we venture to conclude is that the long-term consensus on Folkeskolen's objectives and thus the social and cultural role of Folkeskolen in the lives of individuals and society are under pressure and this applies also to Folkeskolen as a common school for everyone who lives in Denmark.

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