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# UPDATE: COUNTRY BACKGROUND REPORT FOR DENMARK



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## **DENMARK: UPDATE OF COUNTRY BACKGROUND REPORT**

This update describes major changes concerning evaluation and assessment policy since the Country Background Report was first published in April 2011. The overview of the school system in Denmark is updated with new facts and figures on the primary and lower secondary school. Every section is marked with a number indicating the section of the original Country Background Report to which the update relates.

Note: on 28 February 2011 the School Agency was disbanded and most of its responsibilities were transferred to the then newly created National Agency for Quality and Supervision.

### **1. The school system in Denmark**

#### 1.1 The primary and lower secondary school

2. The vast majority of children in Denmark attend the Folkeskole (the public primary and lower secondary school), approximately 80 percent in 2011/12.

3. At the beginning of the school year in October 2011, Denmark had 1,588<sup>1</sup> public schools (including special schools). The smallest school unit has just one student and the largest over 1,500 students. Nearly 40 percent of the schools have between 300-600 students and the average school size is 354 students. In the school year 2011/12, a total of 566,660 students attended the Danish public schools. A projection of the number of students in the Folkeskole to 2024/25<sup>2</sup> shows that the number will decline steadily from year to year, due to a decline in the Danish birth rate. Approximately 103,000 Danish primary and lower secondary school students attend 526 private, independent schools and approximately 27,000 students attend independent boarding schools for lower secondary students (including boarding schools with comprehensive special offer). As of September 2011 the share of students in private schools was almost one fifth (18,2%) of the total student population, mainly because of the relatively high proportion of students who go to independent boarding schools as part of their lower secondary education. At ISCED level 1, the percentage of students in private schools was 16 percent in the school year 2010/2011.

4. It should be noted that the number of students in special schools and daily treatment centers has stabilized over the period 2007/08 to 2011/2012 and is declining in the school year 2011/12. The declining number of students combined with increased spending represents a present theme in the Danish school debate. In August 2012 a national advisory unit and a national resource center for the inclusion of students with special needs were established. Along with general knowledge sharing on matters of inclusion the advisory unit is tasked with providing assistance to local school authorities, schools and daycare centers in their effort to include special

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.uvm.dk/Service/Statistik/Statistik-om-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler/Statistik-om-grundskoler/Antal-grundskoler>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.uvm.dk/Service/Statistik/Statistik-om-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler/Statistik-om-elever-i-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler/~media/UVM/Filer/Stat/PDF12/120124%20Elevfremskrivning%202011%202050.ashx>

needs children and students. The national resource center for inclusion and special needs teaching will ensure that knowledge of best practice is made available to teachers. Furthermore, the resource center will facilitate new research on the basis of needs identified by practitioners and experts.

**Table 1: Number of students in primary and lower secondary schools 2007/2008 to 2011/2012<sup>3</sup>**

Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
All primary and lower secondary schools	722,094	719,006	717,363	716,877	712,182
The public school	587,591	580,614	577,076	574,418	566,660
The private independent schools	92,868	94,933	95,426	98,961	102,498
The independent boarding schools for lower secondary students	22,780	23,509	24,162	24,136	24,107
The independent boarding schools for lower secondary students - with comprehensive special offer	2,849	2,926	2,998	2,859	2,904
The special schools	9,966	10,177	10,507	10,257	9,735
The youth schools and youth boarding schools	2,760	3,462	4,093	4,184	3,809
Daily treatment centre	3,280	3,385	3,101	3,062	2,559

5. In accordance with the Folkeskole Act the Municipalities are obliged to provide special needs education and remedial support to children with learning disabilities or any other indication of physical or mental handicap. Special needs education can be given as assistance in the mainstream teaching, in special classes in an ordinary folkeskole or at special schools. In the school year 2011/12 almost 10.000<sup>4</sup> students attended special schools and about 20.000 students received special pedagogical support in special classes in 2010/11.

<sup>3</sup>”Elevtal i folkeskolen og frie skoler”: <http://www.uvm.dk/Service/Statistik/Statistik-om-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler/Statistik-om-elever-i-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler/Elevtal-i-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler> and <http://statweb.uni-c.dk/databanken/uvmDataWeb/ShowReport.aspx?report=EGS-bestand-skoletype>

<sup>4</sup> UNI-C Statistik & Analyse: *Elevtal for grundskolen* (2012) [http://www.uvm.dk/Service/Statistik/Statistik-om-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler/Statistik-om-elever-i-folkeskolen-og-frieskoler/~media/UVM/Filer/Stat/PDF12/120323%20Elevtal%20i%20grundskolen%202010\\_11.ashx](http://www.uvm.dk/Service/Statistik/Statistik-om-folkeskolen-og-frie-skoler/Statistik-om-elever-i-folkeskolen-og-frieskoler/~media/UVM/Filer/Stat/PDF12/120323%20Elevtal%20i%20grundskolen%202010_11.ashx) and <http://statweb.uni-c.dk/databanken/uvmDataWeb/ShowReport.aspx?report=EGS-bestand-skoletype-klassestype>

7. The Danish form levels 1-6 correspond, according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), to primary school (ISCED 1) and form levels 7-10 are equivalent to lower secondary school (ISCED 2). The distribution of students at the two levels is shown in the table below.

**Table 2: The number of students in primary and lower secondary school 2007-2011<sup>5</sup>**

Number of students per year				
Year	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
The primary and lower secondary school in total	650.665	653.063	648.862	644.436
Primary (1. -6.)	408.491	406.207	404.495	400.662
Lower secondary (7.-10.)	242.174	246.856	244.367	243.774

### 2.3.1 Policy initiatives in relation to the framework for evaluation and assessment

In September 2011, Denmark elected a new government and hence a new Minister for Children and Education. This also meant that day care was added to the ministry's portfolio.

The Danish government is planning to launch a reform of the public school system in 2012 with a focus on student performance in the subjects of Danish and mathematics. It is expected that strengthened evaluation and monitoring at all levels will be part of the reform. As part of the reform work the government has invited all public school parties and actors - students, parents, teachers, principals and other staff, municipalities and organizations - to take part in the negotiations to ensure a partnership with mutual commitment to the reform's ambitious requirements and specific focus areas.

The government platform states that it is essential that the public school system continues to develop its evaluation culture. The government will look favorably on applications from municipalities wishing to grant exemptions from the rules on quality reports, student plans and other centrally determined rules on the basis of the municipality's own efforts to ensure assessment of students' scholastic progress.

#### *Ny Nordisk Skole*

Under the heading of Ny Nordisk Skole ("New Nordic School") a new learning perspective has been introduced for daycare, municipal primary and lower secondary schools. Grounded in traditional Nordic societal and educational values Ny Nordisk Skole seeks to inspire, encourage and support educational practitioners in their effort to strengthen the quality of their own professional work. Objective-wise, the initiative seeks to encourage professionals to challenge children and students to achieve their best academically and in a wider perspective, to lessen the effect of socio-economic status on academic performance and to improve confidence in schools that actively embrace professional knowledge and practice. One means of accomplishing these objectives will be through the local development of pedagogical methods rooted in tradition, for instance deep subject knowledge and social skills, class community, project work and practical training.

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<sup>5</sup> Databanken: <http://statweb.uni-c.dk/databanken/uvmDataWeb/ShowReport.aspx?report=EGS-bestand-skoletype-klassetrin|skoletype>.

*Group exams are part of developing the school leaving exams*

In the period between 2012 and 2014 there will be a strong political focus on developing the school leaving exams which end compulsory schooling at the end of grade 9 and 10. The objective is to ensure that student examinations are up to date, corresponding with the modern ways of learning that the students are familiar with.

Compulsory oral group exams will be launched from May/June 2013 in Mathematics at the 9th and 10th form level. The students' performance will be individually assessed and each student will receive an individual grade.

As part of developing the school leaving exams in general, other initiatives might be taken from 2012 to 2014 for example in relation to further digitalization of the exams.

*Evaluation of the national tests*

The national tests will be evaluated in 2013. The purpose of the evaluation is assessing whether the national tests have worked as an educational tool and thus have strengthened the evaluation culture of the schools and the municipalities as well as the students' academic performance. The result of the evaluation of the national tests will be presented in a statement by the Minister for Children and Education to parliament in late 2013.

### 2.3.2 Stakeholders' views on evaluation and assessment policies

The chairmanship of the School Council concludes in reports from 2011 and 2012 that there is no need to develop new national assessment tools such as student plans, national tests and quality reports for schools. However, there is a need to make adjustments to the already known tools.

In 2011 the chairmanship recommended the establishment of national learning objectives. It was further recommended that the existing school leaving examinations be replaced by two new examinations, one based on learning objectives and the other a project assignment, where both the student's academic skills and all-round personal development is evaluated.

In the report for 2012 the chairmanship recommends a check of the regulatory framework regarding student plans and quality reports in order to examine whether the level of detail (the resources spent) is commensurate with the value that this tool provides for student learning.

In addition, the chairmanship recommends that the Minister for Children and Education initiates studies to support the educational follow-up on the results of the national tests. This would provide teachers and school leaders with a clear indicator of when it is deemed necessary with a targeted action in particular areas. The chairmanship also recommends that the Minister develops a comprehensive knowledge strategy at the primary and lower secondary level to ensure continuous improvement of comparable evidence on school matters and that this documentation is made available to everyone in an easily accessible manner.

## 2.4 Perspectives

### *Teachers' use of National Tests results*

79. Following the mandatory tests of June 2010 and June 2011, surveys performed by the National Agency for Quality and Supervision showed a marked increase in teachers' use of National Tests results. In 2011 56 % of surveyed teachers stated that they had used test results when planning teaching activities<sup>6</sup>. The comparative figure in 2010 was 29 %. Furthermore, 89 % of teachers in 2011 used National Tests in assessing students' academic performance either to a large or to a certain extent; an increase from 64 % in 2010.

83. The PISA studies have repeatedly disclosed that the performance of Danish students in the Folkeskole is well below the national ambition. In PISA 2009, the performance in reading and science was on par with the OECD average whereas the performance in mathematics was slightly above. However, the overall trend in math is descending with 2009 results displaying a drop compared to previous PISA studies in 2003 and 2006. The results in reading and science do not differ significantly from earlier PISA studies. Given the national emphasis on primary and lower secondary education this is far from satisfactory and the negative gap in PISA performance between Denmark and comparable OECD countries is perceived as an impediment for future growth and prosperity.

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