

# Bedford-Copenhagen Learning Exchange

B3 Group Visit: 11<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015

## Ørestad Gymnasium - Sixth Form College



Upon approaching Ørestad Gymnasium, one is immediately struck by the 'office'-like appearance of this sixth form college. As you walk towards the building, there is an ethos of professionalism and high expectation that emanates from the structure itself. It is as if you were approaching an established modern multi-global company within the city.

The school was designed to achieve 'a more dynamic and life-like studying environment, introducing IT as a main tool. The intention (was) to enforce the students' abilities gradually to take responsibility for their own learning, being able to work in teams as well as working individually.' To that end, it has certainly appears to have achieved its goal.



The school is an architecturally award-winning building, completed in 2006 at a cost of DKK 200 million (€ 27 million) and purposely designed to 'fulfil new educational visions regarding subjects, organisation and teaching systems.'

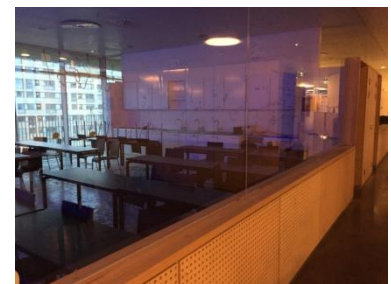
As you walk into the building, you are immediately overwhelmed by the openness and amount of space. There are approximately 1100 students of sixth form age attending this 'high school'. They are placed into 42 classes and 110 teachers prepare the students for a variety of Further Education including going onto University and Professional University which is a

vocational training university for vocations such as teaching. Very few of the students who attend Ørestad Gymnasium live in the area. They travel in to the school from all of the Copenhagen municipalities.



The school is an image of an 'open office'. There are wide, open areas on all the levels in which teaching takes place although there are dividers to indicate where those spaces are within the building. The open areas are designed to develop the students' independent work. There are the more 'traditional classrooms' which tend to be the science labs. There are four walls

which enclose a teaching space but the 'walls' are glass and are used for writing on so scientific formulae are easily viewed from both within and without the teaching area.



All students follow 80% of the subjects taught within the school. An educational reform in 2005 resulted in more collaboration between teachers. The result of this was the teaching of certain subjects much more relevant within other subjects and subject areas. For example, certain aspects of English would be taught that were appropriate and relevant within journalism and adaptations were made to make it more suitable when teaching it within, for example, Biotechnology.

As a result of this reform, teachers in the school have established a team-working approach and work much more together within subject areas so they can be linked to make it more relevant, for example, History and Social Studies. Teachers are members of cross-curricular teams working between and around the class of students and the subject. Allan Kjær Anderson, the Gymnasium's Principal, was passionate about the fact 'that the best thing about his job was his colleagues.'

Each subject group and class has a small team of teachers allocated to them so the pupils are well-known to the staff who teach them and they are also supported pastorally very well.

The role of the teacher in this school is that of a consultant. The students are being prepared for their role in society and their future place of work. Individual responsibility underpins everything they do and the expectation is the student will access their learning which is available digitally throughout the school.

The decision was taken in 2012 that over a three year period the school would become completely digital resulting in a high level of teaching through ICT. The only area still relying on traditional methods of pen and paper is when the students take their math exams!

The success of the use of digital teaching methods is attributed to the high level of collaboration of the teachers. Together the staff have collected together a wealth of e-books; subscription websites; worked with publishers to scan text books and teacher-produced websites to support the students learning. This was seen by the staff as a pedagogical project providing quality teaching materials and has been hugely cost-effective as the costs of the resources have been reduced.

Long-term planning between teachers is deemed to be very important between teachers in the team. The use of ICT is structured and the students have an expectation that everything will be available digitally. Google documents are used as teachers are able to check content and writing of students' work immediately so the staff are able to provide instant feedback to their pupils.

The staff recognise the fact that using ICT has its related problems and using ICT does not solve all teaching and learning problems. The school is open-plan and noise from the use of social media can interrupt learning. Also, students can become bored if only interacting with a device so 'breaks' are deliberately planned into lessons when students don't use it.

Students have to learn 'good habits' and school should be the place to learn them before they set out in 'the world of work'.

Through their collaborative work, the teachers use other the teachers in the schools as moderators of their work. For example, the Maths teachers have written an e-book together but to establish its integrity, they are in need of an editor to ascertain the quality of the contents!



Ørestad Gymnasium became the first 'Apple' school in Denmark. Students have either an iPad or a computer upon which to work. Upon entry to the school, the student chooses the device with which they wish to work and the school either pays for the iPad or there is a price reduction if the student opts for a computer. One-third of students currently have an iPad with two-thirds opting for a computer.

The Principal, Allan Kjær Anderson, would have liked the school to opt to use only one device but due to staff input and feedback about their individual preferences when using a particular device, the decision was made to go for a 'mixed economy'. This is acknowledged as a good decision because the Principal recognised he could not force his personal preference onto the staff or pupils.

The students who attend Ørestad Gymnasium travel in by Metro from all over Copenhagen. The progress of the students and their results are seen to be average. Up until now, the perception is when the students' background is taken into account, then 'average is ok!' This perception is changing and the school recognizes the need to support and develop their 'weaker' students and get better at developing the 'good' students.

The location of the school is 'known for weaker education'. The school may focus on developing their students' competency of skills required in the 21st century but they have also identified that the teaching and learning of the traditional subjects of Maths and Science in the school is not as strong as it could be and acknowledge that these are subjects in need of development to improve results.

When students leave the school, 25-30% go to University and 40% go onto a 'Professional University'.



Gymnasiums were once perceived to be schools for 'the elite'. Now 70% of pupils in Copenhagen attend them. Ørestad Gymnasium is a modern, futuristic school and one that is designed to be 'a school in the digital world, not outside it'. The students attending this school are certainly given an insight into their future through the environment in which they study and the digital tools they are expected to use on a daily basis.

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January 2015