

Bedford-Copenhagen Learning Exchange

B3 Group Visit: 11th - 15th January 2015

Holbergskolen School

Holbergskolen School is an all through school for children aged from six to sixteen. There are 630 students, mostly arranged in three classes per year group, but there are only two classes in the year groups that were initially affected by the catchment change mentioned below. In addition there are approximately 50 children based in a Hospital School linked to the school. This school provides education for children with a range of medical issues but has a high proportion of those with mental health issues. There are 50 staff based in the 'mainstream, school and 12 in the Hospital School. Holbergskolen School was established in 1952. Copenhagen has five school areas and the one within which Holbergskolen School is situated contains ten districts. Up until eight years ago the school intake was almost completely of children from white affluent families who lived on the side of the school further away from central Copenhagen. At this time Copenhagen rearranged its catchment area so that housing areas closer towards Copenhagen central became part of the intake. These children are described as being from predominantly multicultural and poorer families.



In Danish schools there is no choice for parents over which local school they can send their children. If parents do not like the local school, and they can afford to do so, they send their children to a private school. This is not as expensive as the British system because a certain level of funding follows the child. As such a parent only needs to pay about a quarter of the fees for their child. When the Holbergskolen catchment area was changed initially there was a fall in the number of children attending the school but now an increasing number are attending and the proportion of parents who are sending their children to private schools is falling.

The school is said to be 'in a good place', being financially stable, in its original buildings but with an extension for the foundation stage and refurbishments for the science and food technology rooms. Every school has an Annual Report that is posted on its website that includes lots of tables including those for results, sickness etc. The report includes a Heads Report that is very much like a School Evaluation Form and comments on the progress of the school and contains an Action Plan for future activity.

Resources and staffing

As with most schools that we visited there seems to be lots of space within Holbergskolen School. Corridors are wide and classrooms are spacious. The maximum class size that is permitted is 28 and special permission needs to be sought to extend it above this number. First, Second and Third Grade students each have an iPad, Grades 4, 5 and 6 share iPads or PCs and Grades 7, 8 and 9 all have access to PCs. The school still retains one room with 50 computers and have resisted moving these to classrooms due to occasional problems with Wi-Fi connectivity. We were particularly impressed with some of the furniture design which had simple but thoughtful elements i.e. hooks at the end for bags and under desk brackets to slide chairs on to at the end of the day (chairs cannot damage table surfaces / still allows chairs to be off the floor to help with cleaning). Simple extraction fans above science work stations are also more effective than expensive and large fume cupboards!



The school buildings are rented, but responsibility for maintenance remains with the Headteacher. It helps that Denmark is perhaps the best funded education system with the world. Almost everything is



free to the children, for example day trips and residential trips in 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th Grades are all funded. The new School Reform which started to be phased in from August 2014 is the biggest change in Education within Denmark in the past 40 years. It will mean students staying at school, at a Homework Café, or its' associated after school facilities for longer and staff remaining on the school premises until later. Until this academic year staff were often able to leave school by about 2:30pm, but this is now being extended in many cases to 4:00pm. This change in working conditions has apparently seen many teachers

leave the profession even though the maximum teaching load for any teacher is still only 19 hours per week. To support the later working schools have had to make sure that working spaces are provided. At Holbergskolen the headteacher has also thought further about staff wellbeing and purchased a massage chair which is set in its own room.



Up until now many schools have had a small number of pedagogues (a role a bit like a teaching assistant) that have worked to support teachers within lessons, but most have been more heavily involved in providing support in the afterschool facilities associated with schools. The School Reform is however, seeing the need for their role to evolve with the increased expectation that children remain at school and afterschool facilities. At present not all children access the afterschool facilities. As a consequence of the Reform headteachers are having to look more closely at the times afterschool facilities are used and the deployment of the pedagogues.

Curriculum and assessment

The School Reform has introduced minimum expectations of the number of hours of teaching in each curriculum area over a year. For example in First Grade the breakdown per week is approximately: 11 hours Danish, 1 hour English, 2 hours Religious Studies, 5 hours Mathematics, 1 hour natural science, 2 hours Sport, 2 hours Music/Performing Arts and 1 hour Visual Arts. In contrast in Year 9 (15/16 year olds) the breakdown is: 7 hours Danish, 3 hours English, 3 hours French or German, 1 hour History, 1 hour religious studies, 2 hours Social Studies, 5 hours Mathematics, 1 hour Geography, 1 hour Biology, 3 hours Chemistry and Physics, 2 hours Sport and 2 hours Elective. This means that in most cases students only get to choose one option/elective subject compared to the standard four choices that a British child gets. In addition to this prescribed curriculum children are also expected to engage in at least 45 minutes of additional physical activity each day. This may involve moving around within the classroom, learning games or songs with actions for younger year groups or short breaks outdoors. Many of the lower grade classrooms have a simple card clock in the room to indicate the minutes of additional activity.



Most children remain in the same teaching group throughout their time at Holbergskolen School. For most lessons they are taught in their home base with teachers coming to the class rather than the reverse. Only for lessons such as food technology, sport or science do they use other rooms. This arrangement often means that most rooms have little display because there is little ownership by the teachers. This is only not the case with the lower grades where students are taught by far fewer teachers.

The assessment system in Denmark is a real contrast to the British system. Language screening takes place at Kindergarten (5 years old). Almost without exception every assessment is online. With higher grades this may take place monthly in individual subjects and receive some written or verbal feedback. National Tests do take place at certain ages but these are not reported via any form of league tables. During the three days we spent in schools in Copenhagen we saw very little actual writing, no written feedback of any form and very few exercise books. Most students had General Note Books which contained a range of material associated within lessons. OFSTED inspectors would certainly have a real problem assessing progress by looking at written work. **However**, students do make progress. In most of the lessons we observed at the school levels of behaviour and engagement were outstanding. The reduced focus on having to have written notes frequently meant that within an individual lesson more activities took place and that there was more paired and group work with associated and supportive dialogue. Students were confident in their work and readily discussed it with us, in English, from an early age. The evident lack of a need to do much marking does help staff to work together more collaboratively in planning good lessons. Denmark may well hold positions within the PISA tables very similar to England, but it is easy to see how they could do better. The new School Reform aims to make sure that Learning Objectives are made explicit and it is clear that teachers have started to share these more frequently with their classes. It is also felt that with the introduction of more checks on learning during lessons for example through mini-plenaries and more focused feedback (verbal or written) will improve progress further. The headteacher is looking to support staff and students further through the introduction of a digital planning tool for sharing work between colleagues and also with students.

After school Facilities

Amazing! These are a fantastic resource. In most all through schools the Headteacher is also responsible for the Afterschool Facilities. In the case of Holbergskolen this is not the case. The school is associated with three afterschool facilities but one of these is right next to the school. This has its own head but is staffed mainly by pedagogues. The building has numerous rooms for an enormous amount of activities e.g. cooking, sewing, computer games, crafts, woodwork, film room, music, pets, Lego building, ball pen etc.

The outside area also has a large climbing area and many open spaces for play. The building is usually packed after school and children treat the facility with respect and are responsible for themselves and what they do. This seems impossible, but the pedagogues clearly work effectively to support the younger children who as they get older take greater responsibility for each other. It is clear that relationships are strong and the staff help provide a warm and caring environment.



Support for the whole child/The Resource Centre

Envy! The ability of the school to support early and quick intervention for children is a massive strength of the Danish system. Most experts are readily on hand and there is not the need to try and co-ordinate intervention from staff based away from the school. Every Tuesday a meeting is held in the Resource Centre. This is attended by school staff (SENCO, Head of Visible Learning, Mathematics lead, IT lead, teacher responsible for children with Danish as a 2nd language and the Kæmp coordinator) and a range of 'external' experts some who are linked to the school for a specific number of days a week (Social Worker: 2 days, Educational Psychologist: 2 days, Family Inclusion Worker: 2/3 days, School Nurse, Careers Advisor). The meeting examines the needs of individual students and plans support as necessary. Often individual teachers are asked to attend and discuss a student they are having problems with. The discussion, as with much of the Danish system, is based on an area of research. In this case the 'Science of Safety' which is an Australian method of analysing a problem and working out what to do to resolve it. The goal of the team and the school is that 'Each and every child reaches their full potential'. In some cases the analysis reveals the need for professional development for the teacher in others the need for support from the specialists present. One outcome that is being trialled this year is the use of the Kæmp Team. The translation of this is the 'Fight Team'. It is all about empowerment and the supporting of a student to resolve their problems from within. Students are withdrawn from some lessons for a time period of no longer than 8 weeks. The staff work with the child and their parents to move forward. The programme involves some work on social/behavioural management but also involves 'Turbo Courses' which are curriculum based to ensure a student does not fall behind in any subject and if possible will return to it more knowledgeable. It is impressed upon the child that "I will help you but you need to take it".

A Family Support Worker coordinates meetings with parents to discuss the school concerns and involve them in the resolution. Such meetings often end up by taking place in the family home. There appears to never be any issue of engaging parents in this work and employers are always supportive if asked to release one of their workers.

The strength of this system is that it usually allows early intervention before any problems can escalate. This means that parents are more likely to engage with it.

Leadership

The leadership team of the school consists of the School Leader (Headteacher), 3 Middle Leaders, Bursar and Hospital Link.

Sune as the Headteacher is clear in his belief of the need for co-leadership. He stresses that it is not Leadership but Followership that is needed. He is modest in this goal because without his strong leadership and beliefs there would not be the followership that is so evident in the school. He has been at the school for 3 years now and the biennial Staff Survey which was very negative is much better now.

The school has a Student Council with two of its members chosen to go on to the School Board. The Board also contains teachers and the Leadership Team and the Headteacher acts as the secretary. The Board looks at key principles in the running of the school e.g. longer school day, movement around the site, number of school trips.

Conclusions

Children in Danish schools may not write as much as their English counterparts but they reach age 16 at the same point according to the PISA tables. Lessons enable lots of paired and group work and help create independent and confident young people. This is also reflected in the very low key approach to Health and Safety where a lot of responsibility is placed on the individual for their own safety e.g. no School Reception, free access to the site, little supervision of students at break and lunch.

Teachers report concerns about student behaviour but there was little poor behaviour that we observed at Holbergskolen School. Staff seem very calm and do not need to raise their voices to get attention.

Work-life balance for staff is very good with most teachers not having to take any work home with them.

Lastly: It did snow while we were visiting. When asked if this affected what went on outside the response was "There is no such thing as bad weather, just inappropriate clothing!"



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