

Bedford-Copenhagen Learning Exchange

B3 Group Visit: 11th - 15th January 2015

Korsager Skole

Korsager Skole is a typical Danish school in that it takes children from aged 6 to age 16. Although this gives the impression of a through-school we were very conscious that the school was divided into three clear sections based on the age of the children.

Children were taught in mixed ability groups by age with an expectation that all students would follow similar work in the class and that all students would follow a common curriculum. It used to be the case in Denmark that a teacher would take on a class when they entered the school at age 6 and remain their teacher all the way through their education. This is now less the case with teachers teaching across age groups (although concentrating on a preferred age range) but vestiges of this whole class approach can still be seen in the breadth of subjects that each teacher offered which, from an English secondary stand-point was remarkable.

The school consists of two types of building - one traditional and the other very modern based on a recent building programme. The feeling of space and of clean lines struck us - there was very little display (even from an upper school perspective). Increasing display was seen as a priority by the teachers but this was only going to be possible now following the recent change to teachers having a classroom and the students moving between lessons from the system up until last year where the students "owned" the class and the teachers visited to deliver lessons. It will be interesting to see the impact of an increase in display as although the learning environment did seem quite stark to us, the lack of display did add to the feeling of space and perhaps the lack of stimulation added to a calm atmosphere in the school?

Most corridors did not contain any displays of any kind.



We watched several lessons during our two day visit. The teaching style seemed similar in each lesson, was very teacher focussed and did not seem overburdened by resources and interactive tools. Although there is a push through the recent reforms to more prescription from central government, teachers seem to have a great deal of autonomy over what they teach and there seemed little evidence of planning and little or no differentiation. Students too seemed to be given choice as to their level of engagement in tasks and to how they might want to complete a task. It was perfectly acceptable for a student or a teacher to leave the class for a period of time. This was quite disconcerting to an English eye yet it did help there to be very good relationships between the teacher and the students and the quality of the work particularly in extended writing in English seemed to be very high.

One area where there seems to be more prescription and a more recognisable structure is with second language learners. Students who arrive in the school with little or no Danish are taught in a distinct group for 2 years until their level of Danish is good enough to access the whole curriculum. This was a markedly different approach to that in England where it is common to teach English through immersion. The theory in Denmark is that the curriculum as a whole is an entitlement and the school has to provide the student with the appropriate tool in a supportive environment to access the curriculum at the same level as other students.



A bi-lingual class where students learn Danish before being integrated in to the rest of the school.



What seemed very apparent in the school was the teachers' independence in teaching and managing their own class. There seemed to be some time for collaborative planning and a move towards a structured scheme of work but no leadership or management structures to ensure that this was happening. The teachers are not observed, judged or graded on their lessons. This seemed to create a more relaxed work place but it raised the question of how do the Danes improve teaching and learning. The teachers in the school are also concerned that many of the accountability measures that we have in our schools are about to arrive in Denmark.

This activity was being run by one of the pedagogues. It was designed to develop class cohesion. This type of activity was not seen as a teacher task, but one for the pedagogues.

We felt that the philosophy in Korsager was centred on educating the whole child rather than education purely for exams. This meant that there was a raft of support for children including access to psychologists, health care, social workers and qualified pedagogues trained to deliver support for the student so that they could play a role in Danish society. Alongside this clear ethos of the child being at the centre there is a strong atmosphere of trust. Teachers seemed to have a greater trust of their children, as we saw many individuals or small groups working unsupervised, the senior team trust the teachers as there is no lesson observation system and parents trust the teachers to keep their children safe during the day. Danish society trusts itself to have schools that are at the very heart of their communities both philosophically and also physically. The schools in Denmark have no gates, fences or walls. Anyone is free to come onto the site and to be trusted to be there for good reason - no DBS checks, signing in or ID badges here.



Group work and independent learning, is a key feature of Danish schools. Here a group of boys are working without any supervision on a task set by the teacher.



At lunchtime, students sit together with their class to enjoy lunch. The teacher often leads discussions and conversations at this time.

We would like to thank the staff of Korsager for welcoming us so openly and for trusting us to see the school warts and all. We saw much that caused us to question our own practice not least the contrasting emphasis between exam success here and raising fully rounded citizens there. We are looking forward to welcoming colleagues from Korsager into Sharnbrook and would urge them to ensure that as the Danish system moves towards a system of greater accountability that the focus on the child remains strong.

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