

Presentation to LIBE's visit to Denmark, 10.04.2008

No right to education in Danish public schools

Legal basis

Danish immigration legislation provides for the education of asylum seeker children. The law stipulates that the children shall participate in specially arranged teaching or teaching that is qualitatively equal to specially arranged teaching. This teaching shall be offered at or in connection with the refugee centres.¹

Teaching shall be similar in scope and content to the teaching offered to bi-lingual pupils in the Danish school system, i.e. in reception classes.²

Teaching shall be implemented by a provider according to an agreement with the Immigration Service. In Denmark, the Red Cross is the provider with one exception, the municipality of Brovst.

The provider can, in cooperation with the municipalities, make an agreement that allows asylum seeker children to receive teaching in public schools.

At present (March 2008), the distribution of asylum seeker children in refugee centre schools and public schools is as follows:

Distribution of asylum seeker children in refugee centre schools and public schools, February/March 2008

Name of refugee centre	No. of children of school age	Children in public schools	Children in refugee centre schools	Children not attending school
Avnstrup	About 55	About 27	25	
Kongelunden	12-13	2 in Copenhagen and 1 in Dragør school	9-10 attend Skolen på Bakken in Lyngø	None
Sandholm	No information available	No information available	No information available	No information available
Gribskov, unaccompanied minors	About 40, although Gribskov is supposed to house only 35. (They have some cottages to house the oldest children).		The centre has a kind of "Reception class", which the children attend for some weeks; then they all go to Skolen på Bakken in Lyngø.	None
Jelling	40	8	32	

¹ §2 of the Immigration law's circular no. 622 of 30/06/2003.

² §6 of the Immigration law's circular no. 622 of 30/06/2003.

Brovst	23	All. First, they attend a special class for 1-2 months and then ordinary school. They also participate in free-time activities at the school.		
Total	Approx. 200 children	Approx. 85 children in public schools	Approx.115 children in refugee centre schools	

Source: Sidsel Jacobsen's (Grandparents for Asylum) information from interviews with school leaders at the refugee centres, information from interview with chief clerk in Copenhagen municipality Ulla Danstrøm, refugee centre leader Michael Erenfels (Kongelunde), and Karsten Isaksen (data on Avnstrup, Gribskov)

As indicated, different models exist for meeting the children's educational needs. In the refugee centres run by Danish Red Cross, most children attend the refugee centre schools administrated by Red Cross. In Brovst, a centre administrated by the municipality, all children attend public school and free-time school activities.

Organization and content of teaching received in refugee centre schools

Some of the children must travel long distances from their centres to school, since all children in the centres in Zealand attend one school, Skolen på Bakken in Lyngø. Teaching is carried out in classes of maximum 12 pupils – with an age range of three years. Children in these classes have greatly varying prerequisites, and the children are often moving in and out of the classes. The teaching hours correspond to the minimum required in an ordinary public school. The subjects taught are Danish, mathematics and English, and in principle the other subjects taught in public school. The goal is to approach the same level of teaching as in the public schools; however, the refugee centre schools are small and lack the teachers and facilities to actually teach all subjects. Since September 2006, teaching is provided in the native language of 40% of the children (in Arabic and Serbo-Croatian). No connection exists between the refugee centre classes and the normal environments at other schools. No maximum limit exists for how long children may attend these classes, whereas public school reception classes are linked to a normal class in order to facilitate a gradual transition, and the limit for staying in a reception class is two years. This means that pupils can attend refugee centre classes without any knowledge of the normal school system during the whole period they are required by law to attend school. The teaching gives no formal qualifications, nor are pupils prepared for the public school final exam. Therefore, pupils have no accepted evidence that they have completed their school education.

Many moves from one refugee centre school to another

On average, the refugees who have been refused asylum are moved from centre to centre six times. Therefore, the children in this group must change schools an average of six times.

Educational achievement at the refugee centre schools

At the refugee centre schools, individual teaching plans are made for each pupil, but these do not include specification of the evaluation instruments to be used in these classes in order to ensure teaching quality. No comprehensive description is available of the pupils' educational

level. The results can thus only be guessed at. In a study conducted by the Social Research Institute,³ Red Cross teachers state that the many school changes can prevent optimal educational progress for the individual pupil, both because he or she must use a great deal of energy making a new adjustment and because the stronger pupils must function as helpers for the weaker ones.

A representative study of the level of education is urgently needed, including a comparison of both social and educational achievement between pupils taught at refugee centre schools and those attending the ordinary school system.

Psychological consequences of the teaching in the refugee centre classes

When as a visitor to the refugee centres, you get to know the children, you experience that the children in the refugee centre classes, especially the younger children, are very happy with their teachers and the school, but you also discover that the older children are tired of attending classes and do not really consider it a real school. They seem often to be absent.

Attending refugee centre classes reflects the temporary aspect of life in the centres and its uncertainty; it emphasizes the position of endless waiting for an answer in the asylum cases. This uncertain, temporary position weakens the children's social orientation and engagement. It also contributes to the isolation that the children already suffer, cut off from society in centres. The small school classes limit opportunities to make friends; and, many children never have Danish friends. They feel uncertain and inferior in relation to Danish children, and their Danish language skills never have the chance to develop through conversations with Danish children. Their placement in these schools also emphasizes the parents' and children's lack of influence on their own lives, including the right to decide about their education, thus reducing the parents' authority in the eyes of the children.

The political agenda: the children shall not be integrated; they shall return "home"

Since our legislation demands teaching in segregated reception classes, the children's social development is inhibited, and their educational development is neglected to such an extent that they will not be qualified for an existence either in Denmark or in their homelands. We have failed many of these children to a catastrophic extent, and UN's Children's Convention's demands regarding education cannot be considered to be fulfilled.

In determining the children's schooling, legislators have a political purpose: The children shall not be integrated into Danish society. The goal is that together with their parents, they must return home to the country from which they come.

Regardless of the quality of teaching in the Red Cross centre schools, it is a uphill struggle with this agenda. If the reception classes were meant for children who were to stay in the country for one-half to one year, this might probably be the best choice, but these children have been in Denmark for 5-7-9 years!

The alternative

If the children were to be transferred to ordinary public schools, they would have the same conditions as Danish children and the right to conclude their schooling with a final exam. Transfer is possible in cooperation between Red Cross and the receiving municipality, and Red Cross works continuously to make it possible for as many children as possible to attend

³ Else Christensen and Kathrine Vitus Andersen (2006): *Livsvilkår for børn med familie på danske asylcentre* (Living conditions for children with families in Danish refugee centres), Copenhagen: Social Research Institute 06:25.

public schools. The problem is that the legislation allows the municipalities to refuse admitting the children to the public schools. If a pupil needs extra resources, the municipality will not assume any responsibility. Thereby, we perhaps fail the children that have the most need for support in a normal school system.

Case

M. is a 20-year-old Iraqi asylum seeker who has been in Denmark for almost seven years. M. will tell about her schooling in Denmark, where she has been moved seven times. Her school history in the refugee centre schools is follows: Sigerslev, 3 years; Middelfart, 1½ months; Avnstrup, 6 months followed by 2 years without school attendance; Red Cross Culture House, 1 year. M. presently follows a 1-year hairdresser course, without hope of being able to use her new profession.

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Amnesty Now

Grandparents for Asylum