

Country Background Report Denmark

**Transitions from ECEC to
school**

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Børne- og Kulturchefforeningen (The Association for Public Administrators for Children and Culture)

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Beneath each headline the Ministry’s answer is listed. Comments from the stakeholders are inserted into boxes as to mark them separately. In relation to the first comment from a new stakeholder there is a small introduction to the stakeholder to clarify the perspective.

1. The transition system and its organization

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) and primary school

Denmark operates with a split system with two separated legislations for respectively the ECEC-sector and the primary and lower secondary education system. Children's transition from ECEC to primary school therefore applies to both legislations.

The Danish ECEC-sector falls under the Act on Day-Care (introduced in 2007), which outlines good transitions as a purpose for ECEC-facilities. It can be referred to as framework legislation leaving decisions on the level of service to the 98 municipalities. The municipalities are therefore responsible for facilitating e.g. the children's transitions from ECEC to primary school and to formalise the cooperation between the local ECEC facilities and schools.

Almost all children between 3-5 years in Denmark attend either kindergartens or age integrated day care facilities before they start school (98 % in 2014).

In Denmark 10 years of education is compulsory. Children must start school in the year they turn six years old. Whether the education is received in a publicly provided school, in a private school or at home is a matter of individual choice, as long as accepted standards are met. It is education itself that is compulsory, not school.

The Danish public school (in Danish Folkeskole) is a comprehensive school covering both primary and lower secondary education, i.e. the first (kindergarten class followed by grade 1 to 6) and second (grade 7-9/10) stage basic education or in other words it caters for the 6-16/17-year-olds.

The primary and lower secondary school sector in Denmark comprises of the Folkeskole, private elementary schools, and continuation schools.

This report focuses on the public Folkeskole, where the absolute majority of children receive their education. The Folkeskole is regulated by the Folkeskole Act. The private schools are regulated by a slightly different set of rules, but their overall teaching must be equal to what is generally achieved in the public Folkeskole.

Coherence

One of the purposes of the Act on Day-Care (in Danish dagtilbudsloven) is to create coherence and continuity between facilities and make transitions between facilities coherent and age-appropriately challenging

for the children, thus also covering the transition to school. The purpose of coherence was legally introduced when the Act on Day-Care became an independent legislation in 2007. Before 2007 the ECEC-sector was regulated by the Act of Social Services. The strong focus on transitions was legally enhanced not only with the introduction of the new purposes in the independent Act on Day-Care, but also because it was decided to make the already widespread practice of the Kindergarten class compulsory for all children in 2009.

This development of coherence between the school system and ECEC-sector can also be traced back to the introduction of pedagogical curriculum in the ECEC (2004) and the new provisions for kindergarten class (2003). The two centrally governed curriculums/objects are alike in themes and therefore reinforce coherence. The pedagogical curriculum also established, at least in terms of legalisation, the ECEC as playful learning environments.

In the Act on Day-Care one of the purposes of ECEC-facilities is for the facilities, in cooperation with parents, to ensure a good transition to school by developing and supporting basic competencies and the desire to learn. In cooperation with schools, day-care facilities shall create a cohesive transition to school and after-school facilities.

The local council shall ensure that day-care, after-school and club facilities, etc. are instrumental in implementing the local authority's coherent child policy, and that the facilities assist in creating mutual coherence between facilities under this Act and other relevant acts.

Børne- og ungdomspædagogernes Landsforbund, BUPL (Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators)

BUPL is the trade union and professional association for 55.000 pedagogues in early childhood education and care centres as well as after school leisure time facilities (SFO/fritidshjem for children aged 6-to 9) and leisure time clubs for older children and young people aged 10 to 18 years.

ECEC in Denmark are organized as nurseries (children from ½ to 3 years) and kindergartens (children from 3-5 years) but mostly as age-integrated centres for children from ½ to 5 years. ECEC covers between 89 and 98% of all young children and therefore forms the basis for all future learning. The centres have a strong focus on the rights of children - to be listened to, to be involved and a fundamental respect to play as a primarily foundation for the development, well-being and learning of children.

Thus the main task of the professional pedagogue is to develop a learning environment in close cooperation with children, parents, colleagues and management.

Unfortunately the ministerial responsibility for ECEC has alternated between the ministry for social affairs and the ministry for education the later years. Bad for the transition issue because we like to promote what we call “pedagogical continuity” from ECEC centres to the school. Luckily it is pedagogues who are the professionals both in the ECEC centres, the kindergarten-classes at school and the SFO's. This makes it easier for the cooperation though they belong to different ministries and legislations.

Kommunernes Landsforening (Local Government Denmark)

Local Government Denmark (LGDK) is the interest group and member authority of Danish municipalities. It is voluntary to be a member of LGDK, but nevertheless all 98 municipalities are members. The mission of LGDK is to safeguard common interests of the municipalities, assist the individual municipality with consultancy services and in addition ensure that the local authorities are provided with up-to-date and relevant information.

The municipality's child and youth policies contribute to ensure common objectives across ECEC and school. This may be the municipal's political objectives, which supports a consistent approach to ECEC and schools, supporting educational continuity between the two. How consistency and continuity is implemented varies from municipality to municipality.

LGDK emphasizes that unity and coherence between ECEC and school is a mutual obligation. In the legislation it is only stated in the Act on Day-Care and have been since 2007. Even though it is only stated in this act, the section mentions that ECEC and schools should cooperate thereby making it a mutual obligation. This can be promoted by development and a higher degree of systematic feedback - from ECEC to school and from school to ECEC. It is up to the municipality to design the transitions and the feedback could e.g. be provided by meetings before and after the children have started school; from planning the phase to evaluating after they have started school. This can help reduce the gap between ECEC and school, ensure cooperation, and support the transition.

2. Local self-government – local responsibility

The local self-government in Denmark means that the 98 municipalities handle many tasks locally. Paragraph 82 in the Constitution of 1849 states that “Municipalities’ right to manage their own affairs independently, under state supervision, shall be laid down by statute”.

Many tasks are therefore handled and carried out locally, e.g. the organisation of ECEC and primary education. The primary revenue of the municipalities comes from income taxes, the annual block grant from the government etc. The local council of the individual municipality is responsible for setting the local service level, setting local goals, supervising ECEC and schools etc.

Denmark values and acknowledges the strong tradition for local individuality and self-government in the 98 municipalities of Denmark which is reflected in the local freedom in organising and planning transition in accordance with local needs.

Articulation or collaboration exist between the different levels of authorities involved in transitions

LGDK

LGDK’s primary focus is the unity and coherence in children’s learning within the 0-18 year range. The transition from ECEC to primary school is significant and of great importance to children’s general learning and well-being, but the importance of the transition decreases as focus is placed on the long-term learning process for the individual child. LGDK wants to promote unity and coherence within the 0-18 year range both in terms of organizational context and in relation to learning approaches. This broader focus is also reflected within the different municipalities’ approach towards learning strategies for children.

Research indicates that a good transition from ECEC to primary school is ensured by creating stimulating learning environments in ECEC. Good transitions is thus about much more than the child's transition itself, and must be approached earlier than just within the transition year. The child needs to engage in positive learning experiences throughout the entire ECEC period. The child must learn how to learn in ECEC in order to maintain the desire and motivation to learn more in primary school.

The various municipalities determine collaboration between different levels of authorities involved in the transition from ECEC to primary school. Cooperation between different levels is thus decided locally, and can therefore vary in the various municipalities. To support the transition between ECEC and primary school LGDK prioritize cooperation

between both ECEC and school, school and parents, and collaborations with Educational Psychological Counseling (PPR) in cases where it may be necessary. Further focus on cooperation with parents is added in both ECEC and schools.

Børne- og Kulturchefforeningen (The Association for Public Administrators for Children and Culture)

Børne- og Kulturchefforeningen (BKF) is a network with members from all of the local municipalities. The members are heads of ECEC, school or social affairs within their municipality. The network is represented in national discussion on ECEC and school as they are considered a strong stakeholder within the sector.

The legislation in Denmark allows a high degree of autonomy for each municipality to decide how to organise their practice and collaborations within their organizations. Hence there are many different ways of collaborations.

It's in general an advantage that the transition from attending ECEC to school is done from a public ECEC to a public school. If done so, the municipality will have the overall responsibility and can ensure that the ECECs are working towards getting all children ready for school and that the schools are ready to receive the new children. In this way the overall responsibility for the children's everyday life, learning and well-being is organised under the same management and therefore all employees are working within the same overall perception that the transitions should be done with a close collaboration between ECEC and schools – with focus on each child and their specific transition.

However, there are to a certain degree a difference in the professional and pedagogical perspectives between ECEC and school. The pedagogical effort in ECEC focus more on the child's wellbeing and development than formal educational, while schools are dominated by formal education and expect the child to take part in adult initiated activities. This difference in the pedagogical approach and professional background is also uncovered when a child is more likely to be assessed as "not ready for school" by the ECEC professionals and therefore recommend that the child should wait a year before starting school. However, among the municipalities, there is an increased focus on creating a common understating of when a child is ready for school.

Danmarks Lærerforening (The Danish Union of Teachers)

The Danish Union of Teachers (DLF) is the trade union for teachers of the public primary and lower secondary schools.

The pedagogical work in the ECEC institutions has great significance for all children to have the best opportunities in life.

Focus on playing is an essential basis for the ECEC institutions work. Playing develops the child's competences, action possibilities and life resilience. At the same time, it is important to have great expectations to the individual child and systematically develop the child's curiosity and motivation as an important part of the child's bildung, wellbeing and development. It improves the child's preparation for life. In order to strengthen the quality of the contents in the kindergarten the pedagogical efforts have to focus on e.g. language activities, scientific phenomena and motor function development. Consequently, there has to be coherence between the pedagogy in kindergarten and the one in the kindergarten class at the school. The purpose is to ensure the best possible transition from kindergarten to kindergarten class.

Distribution of decision-making responsibilities between authorities

The transitions are managed at a local level by the municipalities. There is no central regulation on minimum standards for the content or planning of the transition phase, however the Act on Day-Care states that ECEC provisions are obligated to work with the child in such a way that the child will be ready for school.

LGDK

Decision-making responsibilities are distributed locally and within the various municipalities, yet within the national legislation. Decision-making processes of resource allocation are also locally based and depend on local conditions, including the extent of vulnerable children.

BKF

The most common ways of distributing the responsibility are to let the local politicians set the overall political and economic framework for school and ECEC within the municipality. Then each institution has the responsibility for their financial resources including allocating resources for supporting the transition phase. It's often a shared responsibility between school and ECEC to allocate the required resources, so that the transition activities can be prepared.

The local administrations can decide the overall frame for how school and ECEC should approach the transition. Today most municipalities have made local guidelines for the transitions. This can include specification on how to include parents, how to ensure a good communication between ECEC and the school who is receiving the child which could have extra or special needs etc.

3. School start

All children of parents with a legal stay in Denmark are entitled to a place in ECEC from the child is 26 weeks until school starts. The time of school start is defined as the time when the child starts in a school setting being the earliest of the following possibilities:

- The time where the child starts after school facility prior to school start (children are not formally fulfilling their 10 years of compulsory education through these activities)
- The time when the child begins home schooling
- The time when the child starts in kindergarten class.

The notion of school readiness applies to a lesser extent in Denmark, since existing laws require children to have begun schooling the year of turning 6 years old.

In Denmark 10 years of education is compulsory. Compulsory education starts in August in the calendar year when the child turns six. The first year of compulsory school consists of a kindergarten class, which forms the foundation for the children's future school life through playing and learning activities in the school environment.

It is possible to let children start one year later than compulsory education starts (kindergarten class). The local authority must approve that school start is postponed – either by initiative by the parents or by the municipality (with parental consent). There are no centrally determined guidelines for such an assessment of school readiness, and if school start is postponed it is due to an individual, local and contextual assessment of the child's socioemotional competences.

It is also possible for children to start school one year before the compulsory education starts. The school principal can, on request from the parents, make this decision founded on a concrete evaluation of whether the child is ready for school.

The municipalities have different traditions, procedures and methods in regard to facilitating the children's transition from ECEC to primary school. School starts every year in August, but in some municipalities children start in an after school facility during the spring, before starting kindergarten class in August. There are many local traditions, but none are centralized.

Local examples on organisation of transitions

Skive Municipality

Skive has developed a transition program to ensure the best possible transition for children between settings. The goal is to ensure that every child will have a safe and comfortable transition, and to ensure that there will be no loss of important knowledge regarding the child. The method is to use different tables addressed to parents and educators respectively. Furthermore, there is a timeline, which describes several actions that must be followed in a specific order. Skive municipality distinguishes between “must-do” and “can-do” tasks. The “must-do” tasks include conversations between ECEC and parents prior to school start, ECEC staff and children visiting the schools and evaluation of the transition by ECEC and schools together. The transition program is quite new, but it is expected that the program will lead to a better cooperation between ECEC and school.

Slagelse Municipality

In Slagelse, they have two major focus areas (treasure chests and canons) in the cooperation between ECEC and school. To ensure a good transition the nursery fills a treasure chest with the children’s own descriptions of who they are, what they like to do, who their friends are and several other things. The treasure chest is handed over to the kindergarten class teacher to be worked with in school. In Slagelse, they also have some common materials, which is mandatory to follow in both ECEC and school. The materials describe ten activities, such as reading, working with stories, drama, rhymes, songs, letters and sounds, drawing, computer games etc. Both ECEC, leisure time centers and school use the material.

Fredensborg Municipality

The goal in Fredensborg is to ensure that every child experiences a positive transition with focus on the continuous development of the child’s resources and potentials. Parents and staff fill out a form regarding the child’s development including language and social skills. The form focuses on themes for the pedagogical curriculum in ECEC and on curriculum elements for school.

Gladsaxe Municipality

In Gladsaxe they work with four elements to ensure a developing and coherent transition. The four elements are 1. cooperation contract between ECEC and school, 2. table for parents and educators in which they can describe the child’s potentials and skills, 3. “Here I am” suitcase with products made by the child and finally a “Here we are” treasure chest filled with the most valuable things from the children’s ECEC, such as songs, games etc. Results show, that cooperation has improved and both ECEC staff and school teachers have developed a common approach to children’s learning.

Greve Municipality

For many years Greve has worked at increasing the cooperation between staff in ECEC and staff in kindergarten class to ensure a better transition for the children. Besides timelines describing efforts, tables of the child's learning and well-being and book- and songcanons, the pedagogues in ECEC and kindergarten class have met regularly to discuss pedagogy, practice and other issues concerning transitions. The staff has even exchanged jobs for one or two days a year to learn more about each other's practice. Greve has experienced that the transition has become more successful and systematic.

BUPL

Some municipalities (e.g. Holbæk and Ringsted) have introduced a system for improved quality in the transition by having pedagogues specially employed to follow children from kindergarten to school ("samtænkende pædagoger"). These pedagogues are in the kindergarten in the spring and follow the children to school and stay there in the autumn together with the children and the staff of the school. This solution secure that a professional knows the children and their individual stories, strengths and needs making the children feel safe and confident in the transition period.

LGDK

Several municipalities are working with annual cycles and concepts that support the good transition. These concepts, however, vary from municipality to municipality, as they are based upon local conditions within the municipality. Most often however, the transition contain 3 or 4-party talks, understood as conversations between ECEC, school, as well as the after school facilities (SFO), and parents.

The transition from ECEC to primary school also often includes mutual visits between ECEC and school with (both children and staff participate), as well as joint events. Several municipalities are also working with early transfer to the SFO in order to create a smoother transition. This entails transferring children from ECEC to the SFO during spring before attending school in August. Some municipalities are working with "Continuous school start", a concept that supports closer cooperation between ECEC and primary school. In "continuous school start", the child attends primary school on its sixth birthday or on the next official start thereafter.

Several municipalities work with established methods to ensure that the child's "learning history" will be brought from ECEC to primary school. This is done e.g. through the portfolio method.

BKF

Examples and transition activities could be:

- Children are visiting the school with their ECEC and take part in different activities at the school
- The teachers from the school are visiting the ECEC and take part in activities with the children
- Meetings between employees from school and ECEC, where they discuss each child who is starting at the school. This to make sure the school is prepared to receive each child in the best way.
- Collaborations between ECEC and schools on developing pedagogical practice I.e. developing pre-math teaching in ECEC etc.
- Ongoing meetings on management levels between ECEC and school discussing mutual expectations and cooperation.

4. Political/societal attention – recent changes

There is a large political focus on the importance of ensuring a successful transition between ECEC and school recognizing that the foundation for a successful school life already starts in ECEC.

The government has initiated two research and development projects on the transition from ECEC to school not including the OECD transitions project. One project especially focusing on targeting children with a low SES (socioeconomic status) because national research points to the fact that these children are not entering school with adequate competences for a successful transition. This setback will continue to stay with the child through school thus making it an important national policy issue. The other project was focused on developing new or ongoing practices regarding children's transitions to school in seven municipalities. The Danish Evaluation Institute has gathered the experiences in a publication.

The past decade there has been a greater focus on children's continuous learning and development. Thus, there is consistency between the pedagogical curricula in ECEC and kindergarten class education. Kindergarten class must aim at having the children become familiar with the school's daily life, and in 2015 a revised curriculum in kindergarten class was established to bridge ECEC and kindergarten class. The changes meant that the themes of the two curriculums were more aligned. Kindergarten class has been a compulsory part of the educational system since 2009.

Several initiatives within the ECEC area have been introduced in the recent years e.g. the pedagogical curriculum (2004), guaranteed day-care availability (2004) and language assessments (2007) to enhance the children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills in order to better prepare children for school etc. There are no central standards or requirements as to how the municipalities must facilitate the transition other than it is stated in the Act on Day-Care that the ECEC and school system are to cooperate.

Overview of legislative changes:

2004: Pedagogical curriculum for ECEC: Introduced to support children's development and learning. The curriculum includes six themes and an obligation to work with each child's learning. The content of this is not regulated within the curriculum framework.

2007: Act on Day-Care was introduced: Regulations for day care, after-school and club facilities, etc. were combined in a separate law.

2009: Kindergarten class became compulsory

2014: Reform of the public school

The reform of the public school from 2014 introduced longer school days. This also applies to kindergarten class and early stages of primary school.

2015: A revised curriculum for kindergarten class

Following the reform of the public school curriculums (Common Objectives) for all grades where revised.

Current trends/debates regarding transitions

- **Age of school start.** The debate relates to the possibilities for continually school start where children can start kindergarten class at different times of the year, usually around the time of their sixth birthday. Also, some municipalities organize school start during the spring, which means that children, who are starting school in August, will start in an after-school facility before starting school. There are no curricular requirements within this setting – only requirements for the contents of the goal and content descriptions for the after school care.
- **Collaboration between ECEC and school.** Studies point to the fact that a great deal of children experience some difficulties in the transition from ECEC to school. A study showed that kindergarten class staff found that some children had inadequate language skills at the beginning of kindergarten class, which might have been discovered already in the ECEC setting. This points to a possible communication gap between ECEC staff and kindergarten class teachers.
- **Recent proposals for government initiatives (May 2017).** The government has proposed a number of new initiatives. Some of them are focusing on the transition from ECEC to school:
 - Stipulate that ECEC facilities have to work with focused activities the last year before the children start school to support better transition.
 - Initiate an analysis on how relevant information about the children can be conveyed between ECEC facilities and after school facilities / schools.
 - Stipulate that after school facilities have to work with either the curriculum for kindergarten class or the curriculum for ECEC in the period between ECEC and the children's beginning in the kindergarten class.
 - A stronger involvement of parent boards in the work on transition from ECEC to school.
 - Strengthening of the framework for the curriculum in ECEC with more clear descriptions of themes and broad learning goals.

5. Curriculum

Goals and purposes

The Act on Day-Care underlines the necessary cooperation between parents and the ECEC facility to ensure a good transition by supporting and developing the basic competencies of children and their desire to learn. The legislation supports the development of the children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills through the pedagogical curriculum, which obliges the municipalities and ECEC facility to work within these six themes:

- 1) Comprehensive personal development
- 2) Social competencies
- 3) Language development
- 4) Body and motion
- 5) Nature and natural phenomena
- 6) Cultural values and artistic expressions.

The ECEC shall furthermore in cooperation with the schools and after-school facilities create a cohesive transition.

A revised framework for the curriculum in ECEC is currently in preparation. The new framework will, as mentioned before, contain more clear descriptions of themes and broad learning goals.

The kindergarten class curriculum consists of the following themes:

- 1) Language development
- 2) Mathematical attention
- 3) Science
- 4) Creative forms of expression
- 5) Body and motion
- 6) Engagement and community.

Curriculum in ECEC

The curriculums are developed and assessed at municipal and local level in ECEC. The pedagogical curriculum draws the six themes, but the day care facilities themselves decide through which learning and development goals, methods and activities they accomplish working with these six themes. The individual curriculum for each ECEC facility is approved and evaluated at least every second year by the local authorities. This is done so in order to support local ownership of the curriculum.

Many ECEC facilities have developed a concept for transitions in the internal structure of the institution which include support for each child and collaboration with different types of personnel working with the

child's development. However, none are determined based on centralized process-requirements.

There is a strong alignment between the ECEC and primary schools regarding the curriculum, since the areas of competencies in the curriculum for the kindergarten class are similar to the themes of the pedagogical curriculum in ECEC. However, in kindergarten class there is a set of learning goals within each objective theme. The learning goals represent standards for outcome in children's learning and development. There is no regulation of the pedagogy or pedagogical methods.

The curriculum is built from the same thematic structure in order to ensure alignment. The curriculum for the kindergarten class was adjusted so recently (2015) that we have no research findings on what impact the adjustment has had on transitions. The adjustments were made to ensure alignment with the curriculum for the primary school and the curriculum now emphasizes a clear connection between goals, activities and evaluation and between knowledge, skills and competencies.

Primary school

For primary school, the Common Objectives stipulate national goals for what the pupils are expected to learn in the school's subjects and topics as well as in kindergarten class. The Common Objectives are binding goals and must be used to direct instructional activities in the primary and lower secondary schools.

As part of primary school reform 27 work groups worked with clarifying and simplifying the Common Objectives in each of the subjects and topics in primary school and kindergarten class. The purpose of the simplification of the objectives has not been to change the content of the primary school's subjects and topics, but putting student learning in focus.

The ultimate objectives for all subjects and topics and kindergarten class are published on the website of the Ministry of Education. On August 4th 2014 the dynamic knowledge platform for the new Common Objectives was launched on www.EMU.dk. The goals entered into force in August 2015.

Objectives, points of attention and transversal topics

The Common Objectives consist of purpose descriptions for each subject, competence goals and underlying proficiency- and knowledge goals. In Danish and Math, selected points of attention have been highlighted. In Danish and History the objectives are supplied with a canonical list of topics and literature. All subjects include three transversal topics: IT and media, language development and lastly innovation and entrepreneurship.

Curriculum (guidelines)

The curriculum guidelines elaborate the Common Objectives for the subjects and topics of the primary and lower secondary schools as well as kindergarten class. The Ministry of Education gives out curriculum guidelines that must be approved by the local authority to be put into effect. The curriculum describes the supposed development in teaching, which is planned towards reaching the competence goals for each subject and topic. Furthermore, the curriculums must describe courses that support the school's work with proficiency- and knowledge goals for all pupils.

Visible goals are important for pupils' learning

The Common Objectives are goals for learning; they describe what pupils are expected to learn, not the content of the actual teaching situation.

The background for the Common Objectives is an increasing amount of international research pertaining to the importance of working with visible goals, evaluation and feedback to increase pupils' learning.

Visible and precise learning goals can assist the teacher in getting a clearer picture of the learning capacity of each student. This picture must direct the didactical decision-making. At the same time, visible and precise learning goals can be a resource for the pupil and their parents to understand, what needs to be learned, as well as a tool for them to follow the progression in their learning. It can be a motivational factor and foster a stronger consciousness about the effect of the pupils' active participation. The Common Objectives are put together as a resource for the teacher in his or her work with the learning goals.

Knowledge portal with inspirational material for the common objectives

As a part of promoting the common objectives the Ministry of Education launched a dynamic knowledge portal on EMU (the Danish learning portal). On EMU teachers and pedagogues can find inspiration in examples and materials to work with learning goals across all subjects in school. The knowledge portal also contains guiding curriculum plans and teaching guides for all subjects and topics as well as transversal topics.

6. Pedagogy

There is no explicit pedagogical approach within the legislation on ECEC, but with the recently proposed initiatives from the government, a common pedagogical basis/understanding for work on the local curriculum will be part of the Act on Day-Care. The Act on Day-Care states that the ECEC facility is obliged to ensure the individual child's learning, development and well-being. However, many local facilities work under the inspiration from different pedagogical traditions ranging from Waldorf, Montessori, Marte Meo, Reggio Emilia etc. The Act on Day-Care stipulates the ECEC facilities' obligations to stimulate and nurture the child's creativity, curiosity, co-responsibility, democratic abilities etc.

According to the Folkeskole Act § 11, teaching in kindergarten class is mainly given in the form of playful learning activities and other developing activities. Efforts should be made to make the children familiar with the daily life in school. The teaching in grade 1-9 in primary school is more focused on enabling students to acquire the knowledge and working methods of the individual subject.

There is a long tradition for ECEC provision in Denmark, and even though the provision has increased over the last decades, the ECEC tradition goes back a hundred years. The main influences are the Nordic tradition of growth oriented pedagogical approach and also a strong orientation towards the Vygotskian developmental theories.

As for ECECs there is no explicit approach to pedagogy within the legislation regulation of public and private schools. In the public Folkeskole the pedagogical personnel are responsible for the choice of pedagogical approach as long as the chosen approach ensures that the national (Common Objectives) and local goals are met.

The private schools are freer in their choices of pedagogical approach and they often defined by an explicit commitment to certain values and pedagogical approaches. The private schools must ensure that their overall teaching is equal to what is generally achieved in the public Folkeskole.

For now, there are no requirements within the curriculum as to work in a specific way during the last year of ECEC, but a focus on transitions activities is a part of the initiatives recently proposed from the government. The Act on Day-Care states that ECEC provision should work with the child and family to prepare for school, but no methods or goals are defined. However, in the kindergartens it is very common to work specifically with the children during the last year in ECEC before they start school. This could be by forming a group with the children who will

be starting school where the staff can work with developing the children's competences, e.g. by giving them more responsibility, as well as introduce them to school-like environments and talk about expectations towards starting school. A traditional day in ECEC is characterized by a flow of playful learning through activities initiated by the pedagogical staff as well as time dedicated to child-child interactions and play. During the last year, some more activities are introduced in order to prepare the children for a school setting. However, this is locally arranged.

Goal-oriented education following Common Objectives for kindergarten class forms the framework for the content of the everyday of kindergarten class. Kindergarten class is mandatory 30 hours/week while kindergarten is voluntary.

BUPL

The pedagogical activities in ECEC is based on professional knowledge, experiences and research that the pedagogues get during their education at the college and that is further developed at the ECEC centres and through continuous professional development. BUPL supports pedagogues actively by financing research and developmental projects on ECEC in cooperation with universities and research centres.

The pedagogy in ECEC is built upon a holistic approach to children's development, well-being and learning. The formation of the personality, social and emotional competences is seen in close interaction with the well-being and the learning of the child. The importance of the children's community and friendship is essential. The childhood before going to school is understood as an independent and separate time of children's life and is a value within. At the same time and inherent with this approach the pedagogues make sure that the children are prepared for the next step of lifelong learning at school.

Child development

Children in the ECEC must have a physical, mental and aesthetical environment that promotes their welfare, health, development and learning. Children's needs and development are at the center, and the physical, mental and aesthetical child environment must together contribute to giving children in ECEC good conditions. ECEC-facilities shall promote children's learning and development of competencies through experiences, play and educationally planned activities that give children room for contemplation, exploration and experience. ECEC-facilities shall give children co-determination, co-responsibility and an understanding of democracy. As part of this objective, day-care facilities shall contribute to developing children's independence, skills in entering into committing social relations and solidarity with and integration in the Danish society.

The work with the development of children continues in school. The Folkeskole Act defines that the Folkeskole in cooperation with the par-

ents, must provide children with the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for further education and training and instil in them the desire to learn more; familiarise them with Danish culture and history; give them an understanding of other countries and cultures; contribute to their understanding of the interrelationship between human beings and the environment; and promote the well-rounded development of the individual child.

Parental involvement

ECEC facilities shall cooperate with parents to provide care for the children and support the comprehensive development and self-esteem of the individual child and contribute to the proper and safe upbringing of children.

Parents can be involved in the ECEC e.g. through parent boards, parent meetings in the ECEC center etc. Parent boards are mandatory for most types of ECEC provision, and a majority of ECEC facilities in Denmark have a parent board. The parent board is a way for parents to be involved and influence their child's ECEC.

As a part of the recently proposed initiatives from the government, the parents will be more involved in the ECEC through the parent boards e.g. in the work with transitions the school.

In the Folkeskole both parents and the school are committed to participate in home-school cooperation from kindergarten class till 9/10 grade.

LGDK

Parents collaborate with the ECEC center in connection with testing the child's school readiness, and the children are involved in dialogue with the adults.

Parents have the opportunity and authority to apply for postponement of the child's school attendance at the local council. The municipality can on the request from the parents or in accordance with the parents postpone the child's school attendance for a year. The cause for the postponement must be the child's development.

Skole og Forældre (School and Parents)

Skole og Forældre is the parental organization for parents with children in public primary education.

Children in the final year before primary school are typically evaluated informally on a number of parameters relevant for being ready for primary school. The employees in ECEC do the evaluation. School readiness assessments normally include an evaluation of the child's motivation, social behavior and cognitive ability. The evaluation is discussed

with parents in a meeting. If the child is not ready for primary school it can be decided to postpone the child entering primary school for a year. This is not a standard national approach and there will be different approaches across the country.

Our view is that parent decision-making power to postpone entering primary school should be strengthened, since local municipalities have a strong financial incentive not to delay children entering primary school. The degree of involvement by the child itself varies from institution to institution. Our view is that child-involvement could be strengthened. Often children in ECEC visit the local public school in the final year before primary school along with other school readiness relevant activities in order to improve general school-readiness.

The first year in primary school is a transitional year between daycare and school. The curriculum still to a large extent reflects pedagogic practices from ECEC and as such eases the child's transition from ECEC to school. In our view this in general works very well.

DLF

There must be continuity in the parent cooperation, e.g. by inviting the parents to meetings in the kindergarten and kindergarten class before school start, and by providing the parents with information about the school start. It is recommended that parents, kindergarten and school hold joint meetings at the school start – in particular for disadvantaged children and families.

7. Policies for vulnerable children

Language assessment and stimulation

Language assessment and language stimulation: the local authorities are responsible for performing a language assessment for children aged three, if any linguistic, behavioral or other issues indicate that the child may need language stimulation. The municipality furthermore is obliged to perform a language assessment of all children aged three, who are not enrolled in an ECEC. The municipality may decide to assess children aged two instead of three. The municipality has to provide language stimulation in form of either a 15 hour or 30 hour ECEC provision, if the assessment indicates that the child needs language stimulation. The purpose is to help e.g. bilingual children's language development and ensuring that all children have sufficient language skills to ensure development and learning in ECEC and school.

LGDK

Various national tests and screening tools are developed. These, and a language assessment test at the child's third year, may be used by municipalities and institutions in varying degrees. Should the ECEC staff or the parents have uncertainties of the child's development, testing will help detect the child's language level for example.

BKF

All 3 year old children in ECEC with language difficulties must receive a language assessment. Some municipalities follow up on the assessment when the child is 5 or 6 years old. But this is not mandatory.

The test is used to assess the child's language skills and to determine what, if any, interventions are needed so that the child will have the necessary language skills when they start school.

The language test will often be done in cooperation between the ECEC staff and specialised professionals. Only children, where staff see indications of the children needing language stimulation. But for some municipalities it is part of their early intervention programme to test all 3 year olds, in order to discover all children who have language difficulties.

Regarding school

Students with special educational needs (more than 9 hours support a week), and bilingual students in need of support in Danish acquisition receive special teaching herein. It is a municipal matter to assess each child's needs and take appropriate action.

Equal access

Subsidies: To ensure all children's equal access to ECEC, parents with an income below a certain limit may, in addition to the general subsidy for a place in ECEC, receive an extra subsidy, called "aided place subsi-

dy”, from the local authority to reduce the parental payment. Parents can be granted a subsidy of 100 pct. of their payment which will therefore eliminate the parental payment altogether.

The Ministry for Children and Social Affairs is running a project in 2015-2018 entitled “Strengthened transition to school for vulnerable children in day care”. The project objective is to ensure a good transition from day care to school through an early school preparing effort in day care in vulnerable residential areas. The aim is to strengthen the cognitive and social skills among vulnerable children aged 4-6 years and to develop the cooperation on transitions and the connection between ECEC and primary school. The project is based on research and existing local experiences and specific initiatives will be tested in three municipalities. The goal is that more children remain included in the general development and learning communities.

The Folkeskole is free of charge. If parents choose private schools they pay a part of the expenses of their children’s education, but the private school also receive large public funding.

8. Staff

The state is responsible for the bachelor degree programs in pedagogy, which qualifies the students to get the job title and work in school and ECEC as pedagogues. The pedagogy education was reformed in 2015 by the Ministry of Higher Education. There exist no national requirements for the educational level of the staff except for staff conducting the language assessment. Both pedagogues (with a bachelor degree in pedagogy), pedagogical assistants (with 2 years and three months of pedagogical training), and assistants without vocational training can be working in ECEC. There is no national requirement for the amount of pedagogues in an ECEC facility. The municipalities are responsible for the ongoing training for the staff in their ECEC facilities, but there is no requirement from the state to do so.

The state is also responsible for a vocational training (the pedagogical assistant education). The vocational training program was implemented in 2007 and aims at pedagogical staff with no prior education especially staff in home-based care. The share of staff with this vocational training is still quite low, as the training program is not yet 10 years old.

58 % of the staff in ECEC has a pedagogical education. The rest of the staff has either no vocational training or the pedagogical assistant education.

Strategies to support staff in ensuring successful transitions is decided and developed at the local level by the municipalities.

The kindergarten class manager in charge of education in kindergarten class will typically be an educated pedagogue, thereby having the same educational background as ECEC staff. Furthermore teachers can perform delimited teaching assignments in kindergarten class.

From 1st grade to 9th/10th grade the teaching is conducted by teachers with a bachelor degree program in teaching. The teachers specialize in different subjects. As part of the 2014-reform of the Folkeskole, pedagogues can perform delimited teaching assignments in 1st till 9th/10th grade.

The Ministry for Education has a web-based venue www.EMU.dk for pedagogues and teachers, where staff can get information and inspiration.

Collaborations between authorities and ECEC/primary school on professional continuity

The local authority is responsible for allocating the sufficient resources to facilitate transitions. There are no central regulations as to support collaborations between authorities, however there are many local examples of such collaborations.

LGDK

Some municipalities develop measures to ensure common skills across ECEC and school staff. In addition, diploma programs as well as other targeted courses that support a common understanding of learning across ECEC and schools are available. Staff and management will furthermore address the topic professional continuity.

LGDK emphasizes unity and coherence in skills development and learning understandings across ECEC and schools that support the municipal's strategies in the area.

BKF

Involvement of the staff can be done differently. Staff are involved through the formal forum for cooperation and dialogue between staff and management, through communication with the political committees in the local councils and through the unions etc.

DLF

The ECEC services must have sufficient resources, in a way that the staffing permits an active and empathic interaction between the trained pedagogues and the children. The pedagogues must have the possibility to challenge and support the individual child with a view to its wellbeing, learning and bildung in order to create the best possible preconditions for the child's continued development. In this way, the influence of the negative social heritage will be reduced.

There should be created a possibility to establish cooperation regarding this transition. It should be possible to establish a professional dialogue between kindergarten and school about pedagogy, learning and the view on children with the purpose to plan the educational activities for the group of children. The municipality must ensure that the cross-professional cooperation in the municipalities is strengthened in order to support the professional handing over regarding the individual child in the transition from kindergarten to school. There must be adequate staffing in order to enable the trained pedagogues to create quality in the work with transitions. All municipalities must have a specific action plan for the transition from kindergarten to school for socially disadvantaged children as well as children with special needs.

Professional continuity – leadership

LGDK

The management of the municipality, ECEC and primary school work together to create the framework for the transition between ECEC and primary school. Some municipalities have political or administrative decision procedures. In these cases, the manager's role is to ensure that these are implemented and to support the transition for the individual child.

In some municipalities management of both ECEC and schools have different types of collaborations within the local area that seek coherence and cooperation for the transition.

It is important to note that there is not only talk about one transition from ECEC to school. There are many transitions in children's lives. Including, for example, transitions within the ECEC to "school group", the transition from ECEC to the after school facility, the transition from kindergarten class to first grade etc. In all transitions, the responsibility to ensure unity and coherence for all children lays on the professionals.

BKF

Management at both schools and ECEC are responsible for a good transition. However in practice the greatest responsibility rests on the manager of the ECEC, as the ECEC manager is responsible for setting up meetings with parents whose children are to start school that year. At this meeting they discuss whether the child is ready to start school. They also involve parents in the coming transition as they are asked to fill in forms about their child which can be used in the transition and be handed to the school.

BUPL and BUPL's Lederforening (Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators and BUPL Leadership Section)

BUPL and BUPL Leadership Section is a Danish Union of pedagogues and managers in ECEC provision. The union organizes the managers and pedagogues of nurseries, kindergartens, age-integrated institutions, out of school care and leisure time centres as well as leisure time and youth clubs.

The role of managers is essential to ensure successful collaboration and a common/shared understanding of curricula and "learning" between staff in ECEC-centers, after-school centers (SFO), kindergarten classes (børnehaveklasse) and school.

Pedagogues and teachers are different professions and have different pedagogical traditions and views on the child. There are barriers such as differences in culture, pedagogy and view on learning between ECEC-centers and school. This can make it difficult for the professionals to always meet the good intentions for a smooth transition and can result

in lack of continuity in children's transition.

A good transition demands a solid structure, good management skills and conditions where managers are able to lead the staff.

The municipalities should provide an overall politic / objectives for the development of the child from the start in ECEC and all the way to the end of school.

The managers should:

- provide a frame and structure for the professional's work for smooth transitions. Both for the work within the managers own setting and for the collaboration "out of own institution" with other settings involved in the transition.
- facilitate the collaboration between different professionals from different settings.

DLF

It is important that a cross-professional leadership team from schools and kindergartens join their efforts to create the best possible transitions from kindergarten to school. Not least for the socially disadvantaged children, who have the biggest problems regarding transition.

As for teaching materials, Denmark has a free publishing market. The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) has developed the dialogue tool "working together for a good start at school". This tool guides professionals working with children in the transition from kindergarten to school through a close dialogue on collaboration between staff in ECEC, after-school facilities and school (kindergarten class and first grade teachers).

LGDK

The employees of ECEC cooperate with staff in the after school facility and primary school in connection with the child's transition. With the introduction of the school reform (2014), pedagogues and caretakers have been given a new role and new tasks in school, and thus the child will meet the individual adult both in school and after school settings. The longer school days also provide better opportunities for more differentiated approaches to learning. Both elements are helping to support a good transition.

The use of other professionals in the transition from ECEC to primary school depends on specific needs and the approach of each municipality. Depending on a child's possible challenges in relation to the transition, this is evaluated and solved differently in the municipalities. ECEC also priorities support and any additional resources given to children.

with special challenges in the transition. This is done in close cooperation with the parents.

Furthermore, PPR may often be included in cases where the child needs special attention. Some municipalities also include educators with specific skills that can support the child during the transition

BKF

In a Danish ECEC it is very common, that children are divided into different groups according to their age. Children who are to start school will be in dedicated groups for the oldest children in the ECEC. There will be allocated resources to start teaching the children to focus and stay concentrated.

In regards to vulnerable children or children with special needs, there will often be assigned a special pedagogical supporting adult or a family consultant, who takes an active part in the transition and follow the child from ECEC into the school and stays for a period of time with the child once he or she has started school.

9. Developmental continuity

LGDK

Municipalities organize children's transition from ECEC to primary school differently and differences in both methodology and practice will occur. A common and solid approach across the country's municipalities will not be meaningful and will not adequately be able to take local needs and conditions into account. Most often, preparation for the transition will include visits to the school and interviews with the child's parents. Additionally, the PPR or health care professionals can be appointed to the transition if required.

Children's conception of school needs to be altered and nuanced before starting school. Both Swedish and Danish studies indicate that several children have outdated images of school life that can make the transition difficult. Furthermore, it is important not only to focus on preparing the child for school, but to focus on preparing the schools for the children as well. It could e.g. be by visiting the school starting children in ECEC and/or the after-school facility so they know the group of children starting school in August and thereby prepare.

BKF

The most common way to prepare children for school, are for the children, during the last year in the ECEC, to take part in special organised activities. This will only be for children starting school the following year. These activities are done each week at certain times during the day. The activities are meant to prepare the children for school so they develop the acquired competences and are used to take part in school like activities.

In the time before the transition will take place, there will often be arranged a collaboration with the local school. The children will visit the school and participate in activities at the school in order to let the children be familiar with the school and the teachers there etc.

In some municipalities the teachers from the school will also take part in activities with the children at the ECEC.

Children's views

It must be included in the pedagogical curriculum, how working with the child environment becomes an integrated part of the pedagogical work. The child environment must be assessed from the children's perspective and the children's experiences with the environment must be included – taking into consideration the child's age and maturity, just as it is natural to include children in working with the pedagogical curriculum and in the evaluation hereof.

BKF

Involvement of the children differs. There is not a national standard for how this should be done. The children's point of view and feedback will most likely be put forward through the dialogues between ECEC staff and parents.

Collaborations with the home environment

The ECEC should in cooperation with parents ensure a successful transition to school by developing and supporting children's basic skills and desire to learn. The organisation of the involvement of parents is a local decision in the municipalities.

As mentioned earlier on both parents and the Folkeskole are committed to participate in home-school corporation from kindergarten class till 9/10 grade.

Skole og Forældre

Danish research on child readiness for primary school from 2013 shows that there are great differences in how individual institutions and municipalities in Denmark is working to evaluate children's school readiness. The difference comes from the fact, that there are no formal requirements in Danish law to perform school readiness assessments. When there is doubt about whether a child is school ready or not, it is also very different, how it will be assessed from institution to institution and from municipality to municipality.

BKF

In general the collaboration with the parents is working very well. However in regards to vulnerable children and families the collaboration is more difficult and challenging. The cooperation is challenged by the parents' lack of understanding of their child's needs and the parents' capability to meet the needs of their child. Hence they are followed and guided more closely than others parents and in some cases, to improve the cooperation and understanding of their child's needs the families can have visits at home by family therapist or other professionals who can help and guide the family closely.

Collaborations at setting level***LGDK***

The various collaborations between both ECEC, school, and after school organizations are organized differently from municipality to municipality. Often, the various agencies cooperate through handover meetings, knowledge sharing and joint activities.

BKF

It differs from municipality to municipality. Some are organised in net-

works where managers and different staff members work together to create the best way of transition. Other municipalities organise the collaboration between the ECEC and the local schools within the same catchment area.

The cooperation often includes organised visits at the school for the children in ECEC together with the staff and exchanging information between ECEC and the schools about the children which are starting at the specific school. Also the professionals from the ECEC and schools visit each other to familiarise one another with the pedagogical practice at each place. Some do an evaluation on the handling of the children's transition from ECEC to school each year.

The parents are also very involved in this process and also visit the new school with their child and are informed about the whole process.

Collaborations with early childhood services and other settings, agencies or organisations

The responsibility for determining the school readiness of a child in Denmark will often lie with the Pedagogical Psychological Counselling (in Danish 'Pædagogisk Psykologisk Rådgivning, PPR). Among other functions, PPR have a corps of language consultants and psychologists employed that are often included in supporting and assessing the child's development before the child starts school.

LGDK

Most often a close collaboration between municipal entities will occur, all of which can contribute to a secure transition from ECEC to primary school for each child. Most often, for example, PPR staff or health care will be associated, if deemed necessary. Furthermore, additional educational staff can be assigned the individual child.

BKF

Often in the transition process for vulnerable children there is a close collaboration between the ECEC, school, social workers, department of health care, psychologists etc. in order to secure a stable transition for the child.

10. Main challenges

The local self-government is a central characteristic of the Danish ECEC and school sector. The local responsibility results in variations between how the municipalities handle children's transition from ECEC to school. Transitions are functioning well in many local settings, while some experience challenges in different elements of the transitions.

For example these challenges can be connected to sufficient transfer of knowledge between the ECEC and the school. This is of special importance in cases, where the children have social or scholarly challenges. These children are especially dependent on the staff's knowledge of their situation and on the continuity that a smooth transition gives.

Furthermore, there can be challenges connected to a lack of strategy in the transition, which can result in challenges connected to the cooperation between the staff in the ECECs and at the school. This challenge can be furthered by a lack of a common understanding of central concepts, e.g. learning.

A lack of strategy can also result in some children and parents experiencing discontinuity in the transition. This can be furthered in contexts where children attend the schools' after school facilities before starting school.

In this regard it may be mentioned that it is the intention with the recently proposed initiatives from the government, including the revised framework for the curriculum in ECEC, to provide a clearer direction for the pedagogical work in ECEC.

Primary school can offer children full time access to an after-school care, when they reach the age where they could be enrolled in kindergarten class the earliest, ie. 4 years and 10 months. The local authority may also, with the approval of the Minister for Education, decide that after school care at schools or departments of schools usually with not more than 150 students can admit children from the age of 3 years (so-called USFO's).

As mentioned some municipalities are using this possibility to organise that children start in an after school facility e.g. May 1st before starting school in August. A challenge linked to this and to the use of USFO's is that there are no requirements for the staff working with e.g. the pedagogical curriculum for ECEC, thereby creating a gap between ECEC and primary school curricula. However, the government has recently suggested that such requirements should be stipulated.

There are no centrally placed demands on the content of after school care comparable to the school's Common Objectives. Likewise there are no centrally placed demands related to after school care institutions' work in the transition from day care, but as after school care is part of the primary school, they are part of the primary school law's intention.

The local council shall, after consulting the school boards of the affected schools, set a goal and content description for after school care in the municipality.

The Minister of Education has set requirements for the contents of the goal and content descriptions for the after school care (in an Executive Order). These include the following requirements for municipal objectives and content descriptions:

- The goal and content description shall indicate how the facilities must contribute to the implementation of the municipality's coherent policy on children.
- The goal and content description shall indicate how consistency is ensured by the transition from ECEC to after school care, including disclosure of information about the children. The description should, in cases where children start in after school care at an earlier stage than the beginning of the school year in kindergarten class, specify whether and if so in what way the work with the day care facility pedagogical curricula will continue until school year starts.
- If after school care includes children, who have not yet started school, the goal and content description indicate the manner in which the after-school facility carries the younger children's special needs and contributes to a good start in primary school.

Many of the experiences of challenges are linked to areas delegated to the municipalities. This delegation is on the other hand fundamental and a range of benefits are linked with the local freedom to organize the transitions given local settings.

BKF

The biggest challenge to facilitating a good transition is mainly the amount of resources each institution has to put into the work. Also there are some challenges which are cultural related. The lack of knowledge about each other's way of working in schools and ECEC can make the collaboration between the two groups of staff harder than it has to be. It's very important to have a mutual understanding for each other's work and expectation towards each other.

LGDK

LGDK wishes for greater focus on the coherency between school and ECEC to ensure a good transition.

To ensure more and better coherence, the initial training and education of teachers and ECEC staff must draw on a greater common approach and understanding of learning. This will ensure both consistency as well as better cooperation opportunities between ECEC and school. Education for ECEC staff should also internally be based on a greater common ground among specialization options. Quality in ECEC will not be promoted by more national control. However, there should be broad objectives for ECEC in line with the targets and goals for primary schools.

Skole og Forældre

Apart from the above mentioned there seems to be a challenge in Denmark regarding dissemination of information about the child from daycare to primary school. Well-established knowledge about the child does not automatically move on from ECEC to primary school and consequently teachers in primary school tend to start all over again learning about the child. It would be advantageous to ensure more information is passed on from ECEC to school. This would probably be beneficial especially for less advantaged children.

DLF

In many municipalities, the pupils start in the school's "SFO" (after-school programme) already in the spring, and the actual transition to the school does not take place till August. This long transition period has many stakeholders on administration level as well as institutional level, and gaps may occur in the bridge building between kindergarten and school. This applies to knowledge about the individual child as well as the continuity in the pedagogy and the cooperation with the parents. Some children experience the transition from a structured kindergarten in a group of big children to a school start in a SFO (after-school program) that does not have much in common with the school, and may not have the necessary space for the children. For the disadvantaged children, in particular, many changes are difficult. Therefore, the Danish Union of Teachers believe that the children should stay in kindergarten till the start of school and after-school program in August.; and that the educator in the kindergarten class is the natural pivotal point in the work with transitions between kindergarten and school and SFO.