Koch’s school - Annual meeting 16th May 2023

Head of School report

At the annual meetings here at Koch’s Skole, as Head of Department, I usually sit with you all in one of the front rows. This year I am standing here, as Head of the School. This says something about the changes we, as a school, have gone through the past year. New ones have come and old ones have nego. This is how the life of a school is lived, exactly as life is lived in general. But so much more has happened. I will now shed light on this in my report. Along the way, I will also follow a thread back in time, because much of what we have been busy with this year, bears witness to journeys over a longer period of time.

Last spring, Jens Degn resigned from his position as Head of School. Fortunately, Jens chose to continue at Koch’s until the summer holidays, so that we, in the leadership group, could finish the school year together. In the spring, however, we also had to say goodbye to Anders Terp, who was Head of the International Department. So, we, in the management group, had to recruit og reorganise.
As well as the fact that I have changed from one position to another, we have now two new educational department heads, Rami Sverdlin, who is now Head of The International Department and Jacob Holme Prag, who has taken over my previous position as Head of the Department for the year 0(*oh*) to year 5 classes after me. With two newcomers on board, it is really good to have some experienced hands for support. Here I am of course, thinking, of Palle and Peter, who have stood by me through thick and thin.

 Despite all the changes, we are off to a very good start in the new management group. The atmosphere is good, work routines are settling in, and our level of professionalism is high. Together, we work hard to constantly support the very best school offer for our children at this school. A school offer that is characterized by the values that we reformulated almost 7 years ago in the then Joint Board. We are constantly aware that children, parents and staff should be able to see, feel and live the school's values. Our task is naturally to create a safe and stimulating learning environment for our children, so that every day they experience the joy and value of being together and learning together. But we must also ensure that we train enterprising children and young people who have the courage and skills to take part in the life that they meet when they leave us. We must train young people who can take responsibility for society's further development. We must form democratically educated citizens. It is a demanding task and a huge responsibility – that we are co-creators of the society of the future on a daily basis.

Therefore, it is also important that we take our values seriously. The values are our reason for being a free school and our direction towards our overall task. We should be recognizable by our values - not only in words, but also in actions.
In every day educational practice and in our structural foundation, you should be able to see our values "Creativity, communities and enterprise".

**Where have the values of our school been most apparent this school year?**

They are to be found every day in the small and larger traditions. In the everyday educational space. In conversations with the children. In the learning environment in the classes.

 In the pedagogical committee, we are concerned with supporting the teachers' practice, so that the learning environment in the classes bears the stamp of the school's values. In terms of actual activity, we have in recent years focused on working with the didactics of enterprise. A didactic approach that aims to support the children's experiences of success, so that they learn to step into new arenas, dare to fail and dare to take risks.
Because this is often where you learn something new. The point of departure is that we, as human beings, are never alone. As Løgstrup so beautifully wrote in his ethical claim, the individual never has anything to do with another human being without him holding some of their life in his hands. We are all part of a larger community. Therefore, we should not only learn for our own gain. We should develop enterprise in order to make a difference for ourselves, others and the community as a whole. It requires ethical and moral considerations about what we create together.

And now, back to the school's demand to form democratically educated citizens. Formation is a complex concept that is stretched between individuality and community, since it is in the encounter with the world that one transcends oneself in order to become oneself. It is a continuous process which can be considered an eternal "home-away-home" movement.

A few years ago, just as we were finding a foothold in the work with all this: enterprise didactics and focus on the resetting of our values, Corona came by and our work ground to a halt. This school year we have spent time and effort getting the educational discussions about our values up and running again. Fortunately, we now experience space and time for joint reflection.

**Our International Department, the building process and the structure of the school are more established.**

 Almost 6 years ago, we started the International Department. A bilingual school model where the children are taught in both Danish and English. Back in 2016, we, on the Joint Board, investigated the possibilities of building an extension, so that the international classes could be offered a good framework on equal terms with the Danish classes. However, the Joint Board decided to postpone construction. Partly, as we could not fulfill our dreams within the financial limitations. Partly, as there was uncertainty as to the pace in which we could expand the department.

Since then, the department has grown and with it, also the need to find more space. The Joint Board therefore decided, in Autumn 2021, to initiate a renovation of the old library wing, so that we could create a wing for the youngest four international classes. A wing that was supposed to act as a "mirror" of the Danish school’s youngest classes.

Based on evaluations amongst employees and Kochs International parents, the Joint Board also decided, last year, to reassess and adjust the school offer in the international department, so that the year **0 to year 5 classes** should be considered, to a greater extent, as an independent department. The aim was to create greater tranquility and continuity both in the Danish and international departments. To create an equal school offer that was more comparable to the school course in the Danish department.

 We are now 6 years into the process of a rebuilt international wing with a fully developed international department with 6 combined classes. So, our international children can now begin and finish their schooling with us. The everyday life of the international classes is beginning to resemble the everyday life, we offer in the Danish classes. We have a department comprising of three groups of younger classes from year 0 to year 5- an A, B and I group. Also called a Yellow, Red and Orange group. And we have a department, comprising of the older classes from year 6 to year 9 where the three groups merge together in a new everyday life on the Green floor.

The younger classes (year 0 (oh) to year 5) in the International Department are in the process of establishing their own identity. The children are getting to know each other, as the children know each other on Red and Yellow floor. It is a department that works as the Danish school does;The children have topic weeks, trips out and share common traditions.

\*Indskoling

It is my clear conviction that it was a wise decision made by the Joint Board last year. We now have three groups of classes that both have their own identity *and* a common connection.
All three class groups focus on creating security for our youngest children. To create a small school within a school, where the children know each other and the teachers. Where you as parents know your child's teachers and are in close contact with them. My experience is that, for all three class groups, everyday life has calmed down. Previously, our good intentions were spoilt by tense structures and lack of space. We now have a basic structure and buildings that support the educational requirements Koch's School has rested on for decades: that security and smaller communities are important for the well-being and learning of the youngest children.

 At the same time, as the children get older, we work to open the world up to them step-by-step. They slowly become part of more and more communities across the classes. That thought permeates everyday life for our older children on the Green and Blue floors. Here, the focal point is the community across the classes. A structure that is also supported in the international department, where the oldest classes live, so to speak, on the floors - on Green and Blue floors together with the other classes.

One intention of the changes in the after-school care and club has therefore also been to make the children more ready for the merger on the Green floor and in that way strengthen the basic structure of the school. Concretely, in the club this school year, we have sought to strengthen the communities across Red, Yellow and Orange floors for the children by creating activities that they can apply for across the floors.

**That leads to our work with the after-school care and club.**

 When the Joint Board made the decision, last Spring, to create three groups of younger classes with more equal conditions for the children in Red, Yellow and Orange, the decision was also made to create an increased focus on integration between the three groups of younger children in the after-school care and club.

 This decision coincided with the fact that in recent years, we have had a focus on qualifying the after-school care and club. Based on the latest parent satisfaction survey and five inspirational presentations from VIA, we discussed last year, how we could qualify our after-school care and Club Green. This led us to a new recreational educational vision, a new structure for the after-school care and new measures in the Club Green. The vision takes its point of departure in the school's values and view of children and has as a focal point creating security for the youngest children and opportunities for participation for all children.

 At the annual meeting last year, we presented a new model for after-school care, and we have now worked with the model this school year. For the children in the younger classes the purpose of the model has been to support security with established and well-known adults. The staffing in the after-school care has therefore been targeted this year, so that the teachers from the department work with the children in the after-school care. In addition, we have focused on offering activities targeted at younger and older children respectively. For the older children, in line with the decision to increase the children's knowledge of each other across the floors, we have established activities that they can apply for across the floors. At Yellow, the children can apply for a creative workshop and at Red (or in the sports halls) a play and movement workshop. Finally, as something new, we have had evening openings for 4th and 5th year as well as for the young people in the club.

In the club Green, the young people take turns planning activities for each other with the "clubs in the club" initiative. This means that groups of classes plan for the other groups. The aim has been to increase the young people's ownership and sense of belonging to the club and integration across the classes.

We have recently evaluated the measures and find that there has been more equal conditions for the children in Red, Yellow and Orange. In the younger classes, the teachers say that they feel security is high, as there are well-known adults who are around the children both morning and afternoon. In addition, we find that there has been more participation opportunities for the children, such as the various activities. However, it is experienced as a dilemma to "reserve" more teachers for activities, as it removes the chance for teachers to buzz around and observe the children in their free play. It is a balancing act that we will continue to focus on, because we fundamentally want children at Koch's School to be both stimulated and included through free play and activities.

 In the Club Green, we continue to experience that it is a smaller group of young people who use the offer. Fortunately, we seem to have a loyal group willing to show up regularly. So perhaps it is not just the number of participants that we should measure our success by. The initiative to establish "clubs within the club" works really well - especially for the year group that plans the activities. The young people's co-influence is being worked on. It falls so nicely in line with our work with enterprise didactics that I have just outlined. The purpose here is also to support the young people's education, and their experience of being able to help make a difference "in the real world".

In the future, we will continue to seek to create good participation opportunities for all children and target the activities to the age group, just as we will also work more systematically to stimulate the children’s language in the after-school educational framework. In addition, we are in the process of exploring the possibilities of establishing "A common third place" for 4th and 5th years in the after-school care. It should have been implemented this school year, but unfortunately not as yet, as the employee we hired after Christmas quickly resigned. At present we are working in collaboration with the teachers in Red, Yellow and Orange to establish this after the summer holidays. Basically, we are working to find a form that creates a connection with the teachers on the floors, so that it is not so vulnerable with a new employee who is new to the after-school care.

**Status of the construction process and further considerations**

 Before this annual meeting, you were all invited on a tour of our renovated premises. Several of you accepted the offer, and we hope you have got a feel for both the premises and our motivation for the renovation project. The renovation project is part of a larger overall plan that, in addition to renovation of the Koch’s International wing, the craft and design classroom and the move of the library to the Villa, includes the establishment of a new building of approx. 650 m2.

 Overall, the motivation with the comprehensive plan has been both to solve specific challenges with space for the international classes, to create more tranquility for the Danish classes, but also to look ahead in time in the hope of being able to anticipate needs in the longer term. The new building is an expression of this. Koch's School is supported by a culture of small departments that have a lot of autonomy. It is part of the strength of Koch’s, which I have hopefully also outlined in paragraph ten around the three younger class groups. At the same time, however, the Joint Board also has a view that we must strengthen a coherent school offer for our children, so that they experience a common approach to the values, including that we also create a smooth transition between school entry and exit. Therefore, the idea is that in the new building a pedagogical workshop for the teachers and a common teachers room that can accommodate the entire staff during breaks and meetings will be established. We would like to be able to support educational discussions and knowledge-sharing across the school to a greater extent. Because it is through the small meetings in everyday life that we get to know each other well.

 In conclusion… a little more about the building process and a BIG THANK YOU!

 I would like to thank everyone in the school for putting in a huge effort this school year. Everyday life has at times been characterized by dust, scaffolding and building plans. It takes a lot to rebuild. You probably know that if you yourself have been in a building mess at home. Workmen who find it difficult to keep to schedules because unforeseen things come up. Decisions that have to be made – both before, during and after construction. Together, we have had to find out how we could best utilize the school's area and building potential in the light of new wishes and needs. It requires discussions and an overview. An overview we don't always have in the management team. For good reasons. Because we can't be everywhere at once, and we don't know every nook and cranny of the school.

But luckily the staff of the school does – together. We have really benefited greatly from the teacher’s knowledge of special rooms and functions. That you, as resource people, have taken responsibility for both furnishing and moving to new premises. This applies both to you in the Puste room and the Library. This applies to you who are tutors, heads of committees (especially for Handicraft and design and music) and all the Kochs International teachers.

 And we would never have reached the finish line if it wasn't for the TAP group. In the basement, the caretakers naturally have a very special knowledge of our buildings. And what is hidden in the corners, under the floors and under the ceilings. You have all been under a lot of pressure or a whole year, and you have handled it so well. Your flexibility has been so important for the overall result. We would never have reached the finish line if the cleaners had not swept and cleaned up after us. It has been really ungrateful work at times, but you have all always smiled and taken on the tasks, one by one. In this way, a building process paints a very fine picture that all of us in the school have a very special function when we work to support the school's core task with the children.
 And I want to say a big thank you to all of you.

 If we look at the branch, where the school's administration sits, I regularly consider myself lucky that you are sitting there with an overview of all the routines in the school: substitutes for teachers, new students, reports to the local authorities and the distribution secretariat and not least of all, the finances. Finally, we must not forget you, Alexander. You now sit (almost) alone in the basement and control the entire school's IT. You are in the process of putting your own mark on your work areas after Karl has retired, and things are going super well.

 When Jens resigned last year, and I began to consider whether the job of School Head was a challenge I wanted to take on,. It was crucial that I knew that the Head of School is not alone. That we are a team that together takes on the task of running Koch's School. There are so many small niches and skills at stake in the everyday machine room.

In my introduction, I mentioned the cooperation in the management group, but you cannot escape a big thank you as well. Because you really deserve it. I experience a management group that seeks joint reflection because it qualifies our work. I experience a management group that dares to question why we run a school the way we do. Why we work the way we do – both in the management group and in the school in general. Insight and vision are key words in our work. Rami and Jakob, you have taken a huge turn, because it takes a lot to start a new place, for even though you both have solid experience, the procedures and culture are new. And Palle and Peter, with new members on board, you both have had to make an extra effort. For one thing, It has been a special task for you, Peter, to keep track of the school’s construction process. For another thing, it requires your experience to introduce new people to procedures, culture and structures.
Finally, Palle, I have started to follow the finances a little more closely in my new function, and I am completely at ease about having you and Marianne at the helm for that part. And although many probably think that you primarily have tasks that point to the administration as leader of the TAP group, in reality you have lots of tasks that point to the strategic part and school development.

 Last but not least, my thanks must go to the members of the Joint Board. I very much appreciate the working process we have on the Joint Board. The flat structure where you, as parents, choose to involve us who are employees of the school. I can honestly say that our work is characterized by a belief that, with our different perspectives on the school, we can contribute to ensuring the continued development of Koch's School. We often say that the Joint Board intends to make consensus decisions. I feel that you take that seriously. At the same time that each of you has a huge drive and desire to contribute and ensure that Koch's School's values and traditions continue to be supported and developed.

THANK YOU all of you – employees as well as Joint Board. And thanks to all other parents for your constructive cooperation.