

Annual Meeting 14th May 2024

Report from Head of School, Kate Dybdahl

What connects us here at Kochs Skole are our values. It is the vision to create a school where our children develop into creative and viable young people who have the desire and courage to work in the world. It is the vision to create a school where children experience the value of being part of strong communities.

Our values are our guiding principles in everyday educational practice and when the School Board makes decisions. And when you hear your children talk about everyday life at home, you should be able to recognize our values as a backdrop.

Firstly, in my report, I would like to focus on precisely how it is, we live out our values in everyday school life. This is followed by a section dealing with the closing of Kochs International (KI) and finally, an acknowledgment of the year's work.

So now back to how we live out our values in everyday practice. In the staff group, we have been focusing on how we, as professionals, can work even more to support the children's entrepreneurship. At our joint meetings, teachers from different departments have discussed how they work concretely to support children's entrepreneurship. They begin with the three psychological needs; the experience of own competence, cohesion, and autonomy. By covering these needs, we create a learning environment that supports the children's ability to dare new ventures.

At our joint meetings, we have also focused on how we can work with role models in teaching. Much lies in our structure. Big/little friends is an example. The same is true for subject week organization in mixed age groups. Our children learn from those who are older, and they are inspired to achieve more. But can we do more to help the children find "the next steppingstone" in their learning?

Inspiration to achieve was also apparent in KI when the children made a large donation to UNICEF to support the rights of all children. In December, they made cakes and Christmas decorations for sale in the Ash Hall, so that they could pass the profits on to children in other countries.

As well as that, If you visit the YELLOW floor, you can still see the small houses that the children have built in a project where they had to both create the houses, write stories about who lives in the houses and present this to their parents and to children from our ORANGE and RED floors. If you ask Year 8 students about their trip to the Netherlands, you will hear about an excellent exchange trip. A trip where the children lived with their host families, they did not know beforehand.

In processes like these, our children grow; when they present their work and when they meet new people out in the world. When they must take responsibility. In these situations, they are proud and use their knowledge and skills for something relevant.

This year we have also been preoccupied with how we can promote a greater degree of sustainable responsibility. We want to impress our children, so that they experience the possibility of making a difference in the world. That is why we are so concerned with developing the children's entrepreneurship, their abilities to cooperate and problem-solve. So, they, as responsible citizens, can contribute to the community we are all a part of. Sustainability is one of the most important agendas in the world around us. An agenda that calls for us to take responsibility as an educational institution. Therefore, we wish to support a sustainable mindset in our children and as a school to act more sustainably. Two things that naturally have to go hand in hand.

During the year, we have worked on how we, as a school, should relate to the students' digital activities. It is a vast area. There are many problems we need to address; the framework for the use of mobiles and screens, the use of digital teaching aids and the educational dimension. The educational dimension is a focus area we share with parents, so clarifying roles and expectations is also part of the task.

This year we have drawn up common guidelines for the use of mobile phones, as the teachers collectively experience that mobile phones challenge us in the learning room.

We have received positive feedback on this, and the teachers believe that it has contributed to a calmer learning environment.

In the staff group, we also attended a presentation on how social media affects our children and young people. Before us now lies the work of creating a digital, and perhaps an analogue strategy, for this focus area.

As I am sure most of you are aware, the decision to close our international department, Kochs International, has taken up a lot of our time and energy, both in most departments throughout the school, as well as on the school board and management. Therefore, it will also feature here in this report.

The board of a private independent school has a huge responsibility. A responsibility to make decisions that ensure continuity and renewal at the same time. Decisions that both aim to strengthen the school "here and now" and in the future. Decisions that ensure the continued existence of the school. Kochs School is "an old lady of 158 years". We are obliged to continue the traditions with respect for everything that lies behind us and at the same time to have an eye for everything that lies ahead of us. Knowing that we do not always know what lies in the future before us.

This year it has proven that it is impossible for us to maintain the original vision for the international department at Kochs school within the framework conditions for international schools in Denmark.

When the then board (in 2017) took the decision to create an international department at Kochs school, it was with a desire to be able to differentiate itself from the other international school offers in the Aarhus. In addition, it was with the ambition to create an international school offer that had a "Danish tone". It was with an ambition to create integration between international and Danish children. It was therefore decided that in the international department, teaching should be both in Danish and in English.

This has proven to be problematic, as the intention in the framework conditions is that an international school offer must be targeted at children from families who are in the country for a shorter period. The point of departure is that international school provision must meet the needs of children who are not expected to be integrated into Danish society in the long term. As an extension of this, there is a recognition that these students have a limited need to learn Danish.

According to law, all other students at independent private schools must be taught in Danish.

On the joint board, we have therefore explored different scenarios with the aim of being able to maintain our school offer in KI and at the same time meet the framework conditions. In the process, the board has collected data and experiences from other schools that have an English-language department and has reflected these into the original visions for an international offer at Kochs. During this process, the board also learned that another international school in Aarhus would be expanding their capacity to double size from the summer of 2024.

Unfortunately, the conclusion was that partly it would not be possible to maintain the original vision of creating an intercultural school offer, and partly that the board could not see the international department as a viable pedagogical alternative. It also became clear that a transformation to a purely English-language offer would mean a greater turnover in the student group, and thus financial uncertainty both in the short term and in the longer term. Based on this, the board made the decision to close the international department from the summer of 2024.

In continuation of this, a difficult process has followed in connection with the announcement of the decision. It has been frustrating and exceedingly difficult for our international families. And there should be no doubt that we, both on the board and management, are incredibly sad about the consequences the closure has had for the families in KI.

In order to help our international families as best as possible, the board launched an action plan with the aim of helping all parents in the clarification of what would be best for the individual child going forward. A joint meeting has been held with a focus on possible school offers. Extra school/home talks and talks with Rami were offered. And I, together with Jakob and Kasper, have had expectation talks with all parents of children who have wanted a place at Kochs school. We have also collaborated with Aarhus International School and Aarhus Municipality. Among other things, we have facilitated language tests in collaboration with Aarhus Municipality.

We are happy to say that all children and parents now know how to proceed after the summer holidays. We sense that this has given most parents and children peace of mind.

Here we stand now. My second year as Head of Kochs school was exceptional year, and I would like to thank the Board, the Executive Committee (which consists of the day-to-day management and the teachers' representatives in the Joint Board), the management group and the staff for excellent collaboration.

I consider the Board's work as characterized by orderliness, thoroughness, and with a focus on what will be the best for Kochs Skole. Both here and now, and for the future. They have made a difficult decision. Not because they wanted to, but because they found it was necessary.

Our work on the Executive Committee (FU) is characterized by openness and trust that, from our positions, we each contribute to the good of the school. This has been particularly vital for this year.

A special thank you must also go to the entire staff group. As always, you have taken great responsibility for your tasks. This applies to the teaching staff and the technical/administrative staff. There are so many things happening in and around the school as there are many traditions and frameworks for how we "usually" carry out our tasks. There are an infinite number of tasks that run by themselves, without us in the management group having to ask questions about this. There is control over the cleaning, the administration, the maintenance of both the physical framework and our IT and the daily life concerning the children. All because you all take your jobs seriously and are passionate about being employed at Kochs Skole.

For those of you who work in KI, it has been a particularly difficult year. You have had to work under uncertainty and with a decision that has had major consequences for your working life.

Nevertheless, you have managed to be an anchor for the children during a challenging time.

In this school year, we in the management group and the executive committee have also felt great support for our work. It has helped us during a tough time.

Finally, I would like to thank the management team for a good and trusting collaboration. This year we said goodbye to Peter, who chose to retire after 40 years, and welcome to Kasper. As a new educational leader for the upper school (6th to 10th grades), all your tasks are new and yet you contribute with a meta-perspective and enthusiasm.

Jakob, this is now only your second year as educational leader for the lower school (0-5th grades). Despite this, you have helped to take the lead in the subject distribution process, as I have been working with KI. And Rami, your situation has been utmost challenging, as educational leader of KI. You have managed to keep focused on the problems in hand and be supportive to KI children, parents, and staff.

Finally, Palle, you possess, as administrative manager and deputy manager, an incredibly special knowledge of our school with your eye on finances and operations. In addition, you have been an invaluable support and sparring partner for Rami and me with your knowledge and overview.

Thank you all for your loyalty, decency, and persistence.

In the coming school year, I look forward to:

- to take a proper approach about sustainability
- to move forward in supporting the children's entrepreneurship and dealing with digital media.
- And yes, I wonder if new agendas will emerge here too 😊

It is important that we continue to work together with our values. That we continue to try to form viable children and young people who can work and show responsibility in the world. That is our task.

And then, as usual, I look forward to a good parental cooperation with all of you. At Kochs, we are enriched with a parent group with a great commitment. It is absolutely priceless!