



JRC TECHNICAL REPORT

The school year 2020-2021 in Denmark during the pandemic

Country report

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Foreword

This report focuses on the school year 2020-2021 in Denmark and how, after the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic, schools moved away from *emergency* remote schooling towards a more planned and inclusive approach to education. A number of representatives from education authorities, schools, parents and NGOs involved in education were interviewed.

This report is part of a multi-country study financed and coordinated by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission. The study was conducted from January to June 2021 in Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Romania and Spain. Based on the national reports¹, a cross-country analysis will be published later in 2021.

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the JRC has initiated various studies in relation to education in the context of Covid-19. The first report looked at the existing literature and recent international datasets to reflect on the likely impact of COVID-19 on education². Next, two new multi-country studies analysed the situation of remote schooling during the first wave of the pandemic. Qualitative data were collected from June to August 2020 focusing on *emergency* remote schooling from the perspective of schools and teachers in five EU Member States (Belgium, Estonia, Greece, Italy and Poland)³.

The second multi-country study, called KiDiCoTi⁴, collected data on children's use of digital media for schooling, leisure time and social contacts. The KiDiCoTi study resulted in a series of reports. One of them is based on online survey data from 11 Member States focusing on how parents and children experienced emergency remote schooling⁵ and another one deepens the view through interviews in 10 Member States⁶. Finally, KiDiCoti has also produced a report on online risks⁷ and has a series of country reports.

All these studies provide a timely trajectory of the current developments in education based on evidence. With the results presented in this report, the aim is to take a step further to learn about the school year 2020-2021 in Denmark, and what lessons can be brought forward to make the future of digital education happen.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed are purely those of the authors and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

¹ Lundtofte (2021), Monostori (2021), Mägi (2021), Trujillo Sáez (2021), Velicu (2021)

² <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC121071>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/news/remote-learning-lessons-covid-19-and-way-forward>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/science-update/kidicoti-kids-digital-lives-covid-19-times>

⁵ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC122303>

⁶ Cachia, Velicu, Chaudron, Di Gioia & Vuorikari (forthcoming)

⁷ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC124034>

Abstract

This report presents results from a Danish qualitative interview-based study with teachers, students parents, school leaders and representatives from interest groups (n=22). The focus is on the academic year 2020-21 in Danish compulsory education, which can be described as the first full year with Covid-19. The study reveals how practices from the first school closures in the academic year 2019-20 were brought into 2020-21, the report focuses on the second phase of school closures, starting December 2020. Key findings relate to topics of wellbeing and vulnerability, structure and digital technologies used for remote schooling, and feedback and assessment. Finally, perspectives on how experiences from the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic should inform the near and not-so-near future in Danish compulsory education are offered.

Acknowledgement

This report is financed and coordinated by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, the JRC team consists of Jonatan Castaño, Romina Cachia, Yves Punie and Riina Vuorikari.

Executive summary

This piece of research took place in Denmark during the Covid-19 pandemic from January to May 2021 focusing on students from grade five through nine (ages 11-16 years), their parents and teachers, as well as two school leaders, two chairs of NGOs and one chair of a trade union for private schools. As such, the report focuses on the conditions for students who were undertaking remote learning for an extended period, offering perspectives on how this has affected perceptions of school – especially regarding the use of digital technologies and media – and reflections on vulnerabilities as well as lessons learned and how we should move forward. The main findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- Clear structure or scaffolding balanced with a sense of flexibility has been paramount in making remote learning work for students.
- Rebuilding class communities has been a major focal point in the 2020-21 academic year and efforts towards this have been challenged by the second round of school closures.
- Teachers were surprised by the lack of predictability as to which students were affected by school closures in terms of wellbeing and motivation, and they recommend prioritising individualised efforts in the time that lies ahead.
- Video conference software (VCS) has played a major role in remote learning, and experiences with this media technology represent the most novel aspect of digital learning.
- Interviewed teachers and students (especially the youngest portion) express frustration with classmates' reluctance to switch their webcam on during class.
- Teachers have identified potentials in using digital technologies in the future for:
 - Providing the option for students to deliver pre-recorded presentation, which will make the task of doing presentations less frightening to certain vulnerable groups.
 - Creating options for students to attend class via VCS when they are otherwise unable to attend on-site school due to mental health issues or otherwise.
 - Providing students with more dialogic and processual feedback on their written assignments taking place on various digital learning platforms.
 - Enabling students to attend a portion of a school day at home, asynchronously, as a way of cutting long days at school shorter and offering options for self-reliant work.

Importantly, teachers in particular are reluctant to implement major changes to compulsory education in the near future. Instead, they hope to return to a normal and familiar school environment, implementing changes slowly while paying close attention to students' wellbeing and class communities.

1 National context and state of the art

This review presents research on compulsory education in Denmark in the context of the developing situation with Covid-19. Compulsory education in Denmark consists of 10 years of school, starting with grade zero the year in which a child turns six. Grade nine is the last year, which is also marked by final exams, and the now 15-16 year olds move on to one of four different upper secondary schools, a vocational school, a tenth grade programme (one extra year similar to compulsory education often taking place at a boarding school), or elsewhere⁸. The review focuses on measures undertaken to handle restrictions and school closures since the beginning of the pandemic, and how experiences with these may inform future strategies. Moreover, the review emphasises any results regarding the role of digital technologies in remote or hybrid education. Finally, understudied populations and challenges to represent potentially vulnerable groups in research are considered and discussed. The following databases were explored using search terms in Danish and English pertaining to Denmark, education and Covid-19: Academic Search Premiere (Ebsco), ERIC, Google Scholar, Proquest, SCOPUS and Web of Science. The searches yielded 196 results plus 6,680 results from Google Scholar of which the first 300 results were considered. A total of 13 references were relevant to this review. In addition to these scholarly sources, similar searches in the Danish news media database InfoMedia were made in order to offer examples of ongoing public discourse. Lastly, relevant executive orders made by Danish ministries are referenced. After a brief rendition of the timeline since the Covid-19 crisis began, results will be presented following a chronological approach. Finally, research gaps are considered, as are policy recommendations and discussions on future strategies and measures.

1.1 Brief timeline

Danish schools have undergone four major phases since the outbreak of the coronavirus. **On March 11th, 2020** the Prime Minister announced that schools were closing down, in line with many other public organizations (Ministry of Health, 2020a). This closure of schools and day-care facilities remained in place **until mid-April, 2020**, where schools began to open gradually over the course of a month, starting with the youngest pupils. Restrictive measures were put in place to secure physical distance between pupils and teachers, routines of handwashing as well as ventilating and cleaning classrooms and surfaces. Schools remained fully open during the summer and autumn, and while restrictions remained in place, they were somewhat loosened, mainly regarding physical distance, in order to enable pupils to return to their original class sizes. On **December 7th 2020** a partial closure was enforced as older pupils in 38 municipalities were sent home, followed by a complete closure of schools on December 21st 2020, this is called phase two in this report (Ministry of Health, 2020b; Ministry of Health 2020c). Beginning of 2021, day care centers for children under the age of six remained fully open in order to secure better working conditions for parents of small children. Schools were also open for the youngest half of students since **February 2021**, and the oldest half of students were returning gradually (Ministry of Health, 2021). During every closure “emergency on-site school” was made available to children who, for whichever reason, needed to leave their home.

1.2 Phase one

Danish society is permeated with IT, rendering various digital technologies (e.g., tablets, PCs, smartphones, etc.) available to many school children⁹. In fact, most Danish schools offer Google Chrome Books to pupils starting from the third or fourth grade (age 9 or 10). Consequently, apart from younger pupils, many had the adequate infrastructure to move online when the first closure came into place. Surveys undertaken during and subsequent to the first closure indicate that pupils were aware of what their teachers expected of them in terms of school work. Additionally, pupils generally report having fairly good access to help from teachers, parents or classmates, according to two major surveys (Nordahl, Hansen & Nordahl, 2020; Qvortrup, Qvortup, Wistoft & Christensen, 2020). Importantly, however, both surveys indicate that roughly 10% of pupils do not find themselves able to access help from said sources, which was considered a main problem in the March/April closure of 2020. Due, perhaps also, to age-related differences in access to digital technologies as means of communication (Johansen & Lundtofte, 2020), younger pupils appear to have been affected the most by the first closure (Qvortrup, Lundtofte, Lomholt, Christensen & Nielsen, 2020). Differences in pupils’ experiences of

⁸ <https://eng.uvm.dk/upper-secondary-education>

⁹ <https://www.oecd.org/education/Denmark-coronavirus-education-country-note.pdf>

being able to deal with their work during remote schooling appear exacerbated by socioeconomic factors (Qvortrup, Christensen & Lomholt, 2020). In the same study, two types of teaching practices are emphasised as they appear to affect learners' experiences of self-efficacy positively: solving tasks or answering questions using a computer independently or in groups (via communication software) (ibid: 27). In general, a global survey of 9-13-year-olds in Denmark and 41 other countries revealed that Danish children were a lot less worried about the virus whilst also highly prone to coping via media practices (Götz et al., 2020). In addition to the range of efforts made by schools to offer remote schooling, Danish children could follow televised/streamed learning opportunities (e.g. Sofaskolen¹⁰) as well as the daily public service news digest ULTRA News.

1.3 Phase two

Generally, Danish pupils were happy to return to school, even though the on-site restrictions had rendered the experience somewhat different. However, according to a representative survey of pupils in Danish compulsory education, 70.5% felt the coronavirus had not affected their general sentiment towards going to school, whereas 29.5% felt it had a negative impact (Qvortrup, Lundtofte, Lomholt, Christensen & Nielsen 2020). Public discourse reflected this optimism and pragmatism, as contagion appeared contained and children were evidently not transporting the virus around schools and day-care centers to a problematic degree (Dahlgaard, 2020). Interestingly, the CLASS study reports, from a representative sample of teachers, there is an even division between reports of a positive and a negative impact to the psychological work environment in the second phase (Nabe-Nielsen, Larsen, Fuglsang & Nilsson, 2020). Teachers were most dissatisfied with their own work during the first phase, improving through May and June of the second phase (ibid). During the reopening of schools, teachers point to sparring and collaboration with colleagues as well as drawing inspiration from professional groups on social media as the most important sources in doing their job under the circumstances (Qvortrup, Lundtofte, Lomholt, Christensen & Nielsen 2020). The same survey reports on pupils' socio-emotional experiences during the reopening, revealing that roughly 90% generally feel "happy", "not scared" and "in a good mood" (ibid). Additionally, 79% of pupils find that the teaching methods have suited them well (ibid). Following the heightened demands of hygiene as well as other restrictive measures proved rather easy to pupils as well as teachers in the second phase. However, among pupils, a considerable increase in cases of hand dermatitis proved to be a challenge in schools, as handwashing routines were implemented rather strictly (Borch et al., 2020).

1.4 Phases three and four

As the virus regained strength over the course of the autumn, local closures of individual school classes or day-care centers became increasingly common. 20% of teachers in the CLASS study's second round of surveying reported feeling unsafe, as a result of their colleagues' (lack of) practices vis-à-vis the virus (Nabe-Nielsen, Fuglsang, Larsen & Nilsson, 2021). In fact, many teachers appear to worry increasingly over the actions of pupils and parents, and how these might affect contagion. Also, two-thirds of teachers report negative impacts to their psychological work environment (ibid). The same study speaks to a great deal of worry among teachers over the final-year pupils' ability to deal with final exams at the end of grade 9 (ibid). A mixed-methods study of 9-16-year-old pupils reveals worries over family members getting sick from the coronavirus among 70% of respondents, whereas worries over contracting the virus oneself worries 40% (Qvortrup, Lundtofte, Christensen, Lomholt, Nielsen, Qvortrup, Wistoft & Clark, 2021). This survey also reveals continued optimism and mental well-being among pupils as more than 90% report feeling happy at least most of the time (ibid). Data from phase three of the crisis remain scarce, and analyses are likely pending. The fourth phase starting with January 2021 and onwards is the focus of this study and encompasses a period of remote schooling for all students to varying degrees: younger students were returning to on-site school in **February 2021** and older students started to return gradually during the spring.

1.5 Research gaps

During the first phase, a small study of library takeouts indicated that "the socioeconomic gradient in library takeout (by parents' education and income) that existed before the Covid-19 lockdown increased after the

¹⁰ A free service offered by the publisher Alinea: <https://www.alinea.dk/sofaskolen>

lockdown". This was true of physical as well as digital materials, however, low socio-economic status (SES) families did also increase their takeouts during closures even though the difference between SES groups increased (Jæger & Blaabæk 2020). As indicated previously in this review, a minority of pupils feel unable to receive assistance with their schoolwork, and future research should seek to understand the underlying factors to this problem and how they may be addressed. 4.67% of pupils reported not having access to digital technologies for school during the March/April closures (Nordahl, Hansen & Nordahl, 2020: 16). A study based on interviews with eight teachers in preparatory classes for migrants and refugees in Danish language revealed that supporting these adolescent learners (ages 12-19) during school closures proved difficult, due to limited access to communication platforms (Primdahl, Borsch, Verelst, Jervelund, Derluyn & Skovdal, 2020). Vulnerable children are likely to be affected negatively by crises, however, non-accidental injuries decreased by 42% during closures, a number which should be scrutinized accordingly, since schools and day-care centers were closed down and thus considerably less able to identify potential cases (Martinkevich et al., 2020). Mental illness has also proven to be an area of special concern for children and adolescents as pandemic-related symptoms have been documented during the first and second phase of the crisis (Jefsen, Rohde, Nørremark & Østergaard, 2020). All of these areas deserve extra attention in future research.

1.6 Future strategies

While the research presented here does not speak to the issue of what school leaders and public administrators might have in mind for the near future, reports do offer some perspectives for future policy making and research perspectives. Despite the high degrees of access to IT and elaborate use of digital technologies in schools¹¹, which might give the idea that Danish teachers were ready to deal with this kind of situation (Gissel, 2020), many teachers felt unable to deliver quality teaching under the circumstances and researchers argue this is indicative of a need to improve teachers' competencies vis-à-vis digital technologies (Nabe-Nielsen, Larsen Fuglsang & Nilsson, 2020). Consequently, developing teachers' (and pupils') competencies to undertake such tasks should remain a priority and, in connection to this, teachers' own dissatisfaction with the quality of their work demands attention, even though this has improved since the first phase of Covid-19 measures in schools. Research reports recommend including staff representatives in planning work procedures and making efforts to identify teams that have been affected negatively by the unfamiliar work circumstances (Nabe-Nielsen, Larsen Fuglsang & Nilsson, 2020). Finally, researchers recommended bringing the youngest pupils and final-year pupils to school first – as soon as possible – as this group is affected most by closures and remote schooling (Bjerril, 2021).

¹¹ <https://www.oecd.org/education/Denmark-coronavirus-education-country-note.pdf>

2 Results

The following subsections will present findings in relation to three main research questions:

1. What pedagogies or instructional practices have educators planned and developed in the 2020-21 academic year (from remote/emergency to blended education)?
2. Which type of response has been planned and offered during this 2020-21 academic year for vulnerable students (including students with special educational needs) in both strategy level and instructional practice?
3. What are the future implications and recommendations that emerge from the emergency situation and the 2020-21 academic year experience for planning the next academic year (2021-22) and education after the pandemic?

The study focuses particularly on oldest half of students in Danish compulsory education aged between 11 and 16 (5th to 9th grade). The sample was concentrated on students in the fifth grade (3) and students in the ninth grade (4), in order to get a deeper sense of both ends of the selected age segment. This group of students has faced remote schooling for longer periods than the youngest half of students, making them the ideal case for focusing. When the interviews were undertaken between April and May 2021, remote schooling was still in place for many of the oldest students, who were slowly returning to campus, attending on-site school in smaller groups, taking advantage of outdoor spaces for education and alternating attendance on-site on different days. For this reason, teachers, students and parents in particular, as well as other interviewed parties, were responding with these present circumstances in mind.

2.1 Planning for and adjusting to 2020/2021: approaches and patterns

In order to create a stronger sense of overview and chronology, below we start by taking a look at the analytical points regarding strategies and perceived challenges in the academic year 2020-21. First, we will take account of how experiences from the spring of 2020, and thereby the first phase of school closures, have informed schools' understandings of how they wished to plan ahead. Secondly, we move into one of the topic of wellbeing, which surfaced during the first reopening of schools in the academic year 2019-20, and re-actualized when the second round of school closures started in December 2020. Lastly, we look at some key aspects of creating scaffolding for periods of remote learning, which proved to be a key issue.

2.1.1 Building from previous experience in an ad hoc school environment

From a school leader perspective – and a teacher perspective as well – the broad strokes of the academic year 2020-2021 were set to be planned during the spring of 2020, when the coronavirus had just turned everything upside down. At that time, “teachers were dedicated to small groups of students”, as put by primary school leader Maria. Practices and routines to hinder spreading contagion were at the forefront of everyone’s mind and didactics as well as pedagogical practices were adjusted to fit developing circumstances. As such, experiences were picked up by teachers and leaders, allowing them to prepare for similar scenarios (or restrictions) in the upcoming school year. However, striving towards normalcy in the school year 2020-21 remained a guiding principle, and so the interviewed teachers as well as leaders remained focused on going about their business of planning as usual.

“We were preparing during March and April of last year [2020] in relatively normal ways in terms of distributing subjects and tasks and the things we usually do... Who is going to teach which classes, and so on. All of these things lie within this phase of planning.” (Henrik, school leader)

When teachers were informed of the conditions under which school was going to take place after the summer break of 2020, things appeared to be improving in Denmark, as contagion was low and physical restrictions were loosened. Consequently, teachers were now able to work across different groups of students and teach in

rather familiar ways, following restrictions and guidelines which continued to limit physical contact, prioritize (hand) hygiene and avoid mixing students across classes.

"I think we've prepared in the same ways [as usual], because we thought things were back to normal, actually. That was the case to begin with. We went from irregular schedules before the summer break and then back to normal after the break." (Signe, eighth and ninth grade teacher)

Consequently, the second major phase of school closures, beginning in December 2020, was handled as another case of 'emergency school', building from previous experience. Teachers, school leaders, students and parents were only prepared for this situation in the sense that they were able to draw on their organizational strategies from the spring of 2020. Again, providing a sense of normalcy and continuity for students has been top priority.

"We've been doing the exact same things – just using the computer."
(Asta, fifth grade student)

Asta's experiences exemplify how the interviewed students generally perceived the switch during phase two from attending on-site school and back to remote learning. While teachers and students also have points to make about how remote learning has to be structured in ways that are different from normal school – which will be elaborated in section 2.1.3 – the overall description from teachers as well as school leaders and students has been that remote learning dealt with the same subject matters as on-site school and followed the same schedules. However, keeping remote learning fairly interesting to students and securing their motivation was a different story.

2.1.2 Focusing on wellbeing

Since the first round of school closures in the spring of 2020, a great deal of attention has been given to the topic of students' well-being. Initial studies during the closures indicated that Danish children were doing quite well (Qvortrup et al., 2020a), and it has been speculated whether this was due to high saturation of IT equipment and access to the internet in the home, a sense of initial resilience ("this too shall pass"), spring-time climate, etc. However, the interviewed teachers, parents and students all indicated that their mental well-being was suffering from the second major school closure starting December 2020, with feelings of hopelessness, lack of motivation and a general sense of fatigue. Nonetheless, certain strategies towards building and maintaining resilience had been discovered among schools and families during the spring of 2020 and reinstated in the autumn, as will be presented here. Rather unsurprisingly, spending time outdoors and doing physical activities have proven valuable before as well as during the second round of school closures. When students returned from their summer vacations, schools were slowly going back into their familiar routines, but, at the same time, they were faced with demands of taking advantage of outdoor space during classes when possible, to create physical distance between students and to create opportunities to ventilate classrooms. Teachers generally seemed to perceive this situation as an opportunity to work with the mental and social well-being of their class communities through various physical exercise, such as *star race* or *orientteering*¹². Out of the interviewed teachers, those working within the natural sciences and math appeared to have been focusing more on this way of teaching than teachers of language, social studies and the arts.

*"Well-being has probably been given more weight than previously (...)
Building class community through outside activities had a very positive
effect on well-being."* (Jonas, fifth grade teacher)

The academic year 2020-21 continued certain efforts from the spring 2020 reopening after the first phase of pandemic, for example in dividing students into groups with respective zones, usually based on their year-group or class. Summer had arrived and doing activities outdoors did not take many efforts in terms of staying warm and dry. Unlike some other European countries, Danish compulsory education and upper secondary schools take approximately six weeks of summer vacation. Consequently, roughly half of the summer months are spent at school. However, the special circumstances that had previously permitted teachers to focus less on curriculum and more on activities to strengthen class community and well-being, were no longer present. From August 2020, 'emergency school' was no longer the accepted standard. Students' well-being was

¹² Outdoor games that involve running to certain points and solving tasks in pairs or teams.

becoming less of a topic, and some teachers were missing the special circumstances that had allowed them to strengthen bonds with their student body and created absence of conflicts between students. Schools were slowly but steadily returning to familiar routines of pre-Covid times, according to teachers, school leaders and students. Over the course of the autumn 2020, outdoor activities dropped in frequency as winter drew nearer and the virus started spreading more rapidly again. Students, who were interviewed at a time of school closures, spoke rather fondly of the familiar routine which had been in place during the autumn, as most desired to return.

When school closures hit again in December 2020, another familiar routine – of remote learning – was reinstated, which posed different problems to students and their families. Naturally, some parents had to go to work while others were asked to work from home as well, or at least able to do so. Along with this phase of school closures, extramural activities such as team sports and music lessons were suspended as well, which had been a hard blow to Noah (age 15), who is enrolled in a talent programme for young hockey players. However, much to his relief, efforts were rather quickly made to ensure options for corona-safe training.

"We've been taking runs and doing different exercises that could take place outside in groups that were compliant with the restrictions. (...) And I've requested more training sessions, because it gives me the opportunity to talk to people in ways I can't do at school when it's online." (Noah, ninth grade student)

In line with Noah's testimony, with school taking place at home remotely, having something else to attend to, preferably outside the home environment, felt crucial to several students. It helped them create boundaries between school/work hours and private time, and it provided them with some much-needed change of scenery and new conversational topics. Some extramural activities have, however, taken place at home using video conference software (VCS). For instance, Asta had been taking choir lessons using Microsoft Teams, which did not work very well in terms of singing together synchronously, but it kept her in touch with this activity and the friends she had made there.

During this time, students as well as parents also mention computer games as a preferred source of socialization with known peers. Even though their children were spending more time with digital media – or screens, as they would often put it – parents expressed a certain sympathy toward their children's desire to play and socialize in this way. As put by Jesper, father of two sons:

"They have been spending more time gaming than they usually do, but, in my opinion, as long as they're getting a fair bit of exercise, attending school and spending a bit of time with us old folks, who am I to put further restraints on their free time? I think they should be allowed to pursue activities that put them in touch with their friends and help them forget about the sense of hopelessness they are prone to at the moment." (Jesper, parent of two boys ages 11 and 15)

Going back into 'lockdown' (a term frequently used about school closures), creating the right working conditions was important to teachers as well as students (qua scaffolding). One teacher explained how the first phase of school closures had affected her so badly, she had to take a leave of absence due to stress illness. From her professional treatment subsequent to this diagnosis, she had learnt the importance of setting boundaries between her workspace and her private space, even though both were taking place under the same roof. In connection to this, she had learnt how she must not deal with work-related issues at odd hours using informal message services (predominantly Messenger) with her colleagues, even though others found this approach very flexible and useful. By the same token, she discovered that whilst the emergency situation brought on by the coronavirus had corroded familiar boundaries between working hours and spare time, as well as workspace and private space, she had to refrain from talking to students at odd hours as much as possible, which was in line with sentiments felt by other interviewed teachers as well.

Unsurprisingly, teachers were motivated to talk to students at odd hours because they cared (or perhaps worried) about how they were feeling – whether they were affected hard by their relative isolation and being left to themselves in terms of maintaining motivation. A different way of dealing with this was for a school to create peer groups for students. However, the rate of which was a point of criticism for Agnes, the student organization chair. According to her, a lot of students had reported that they felt they were not being sufficiently

encouraged to work in groups and were feeling isolated as a result of this. Some students also recognized problems in group work, as it, from their point of view, often resulted in the same students doing the work while the others were merely hanging out. This is not an entirely new situation, but the context of remote schooling appeared to exacerbate students' perceptions of unfair division of work, causing them to be in favour of individual work.

In lieu of the school closures, teachers, school leaders, parents and the interviewed representatives from NGOs and trade unions all foresee a great deal of work having to be done in order to repair and secure students' sense of well-being at school and, thus, their sense of belonging to a class community. Their reasons for saying so have to do with students' perceived motivation and sense of purpose, and they point to the importance of taking things slow and trusting in teachers' abilities to make the right decision between staying on track with the curriculum or taking time to do activities designed to strengthen motivation and rebuild class community. Importantly, children who are (or have been) perceived by teachers as particularly vulnerable under the circumstances brought on by the pandemic, must be afforded extra attention in the time that lies ahead, as will be elaborated later.

2.1.3 Scaffolding and remote learning

Providing more refined yet flexible structure to remote learning environments has proven important, according to teachers and students. Initial experiences in regard to this were made during the first phase of school closures in the spring of 2020 and brought into the second phase of closures in December 2020. Building the right scaffolding for learning takes proper understanding of the needs of individual students and their preferences for flexibility in school assignments. Too much structure in the sense of detailed work schedules, assignments and reports feel particularly stressful to some students, whereas others thrive in an environment where completing checklists of tasks provides access to free time. Striking a balance when creating assignments for students can be difficult, and teachers as well as students have interesting reflections to offer on this topic. A lot of student perspectives have to do with individual preferences and how they prefer them have them met, which will be presented in some detail in section 2.3.2 of this report.

A Math and Science/Biology teacher in the fifth grade, Bettina, had identified the problem with tasks that felt insurmountable to some students during the first school closures. This had made her decide to create a bingo score card with different types of well-defined tasks. The tasks – some of them mandatory, others not – were to be completed over the course of two weeks, after which she would introduce a new bingo card. According to her experience, this gamified way of assigning tasks gave students the opportunity to complete tasks they were particularly motivated to do and leaving others unsolved, if they wished to do so, not of course counting the mandatory tasks.

Another aspect of creating scaffolding for remote learning had to do with guidance, instructions and feedback, which was facilitated by teachers to a certain degree using plenary as well as group sessions in VCS, but also through comments in students' written material, handed in using online platforms, which will be elaborated in sections 2.2.4 and 2.3.2 of this report. Creating groups of students, and thereby supporting peer feedback, was felt as important to students, who were facing different degrees of assistance from parents or others at home. The differences in family structures, work conditions and capacities for offering learning assistance are a factor in providing structure and easy access to guidance for students during periods of remote learning. During the first school closures teachers were, after some time, asked by school leaders to get in touch with parents regularly and see how they were doing at home. Some parents felt rather comfortable and self-reliant under the circumstances in their ability to support their children. One parent (Britt) mentioned how she had suggested the teacher did not spend her energy on them, as they were doing quite well:

"We're both at home, and we're both able to help our children with whichever subject they might need assistance. But I think some parents have been struggling more on this account, and it's my impression that teachers have been more in touch with them." (Britt, parent of two girls ages 12 and 14)

Other parents expressed concerns about the high demands of self-reliance that were put on their children, and felt it necessary to justify their ways of dealing with this:

"In the beginning, my son was staying at home alone while I was at work, but when I could see he was not thriving at all with this routine, we made arrangements for him to go to a classmate's house and work, which I think is completely justifiable." (Lene, parent of boy age 15)

In conclusion, planning and implementing instruction and learning assignments for remote learning rests on pillars of clearly structured tasks that can be perceived as flexible by students who need a bit of freedom and things to choose between in order to feel motivated. Moreover, as teachers cannot rely solely on their own ability to provide feedback and guidance to every single student, structuring peer feedback and having several modes of providing feedback synchronously and asynchronously to students has proven valuable. In recognition of variations in students' needs for reaching assistance from parents and other caregivers at home, special arrangements have been made by some students, whereas others have likely felt more left alone. In connection to the above-mentioned focus on well-being, special arrangements have also been made for students by the schools, which will be presented in section 2.2.2 of this report.

2.2 New pedagogies and instructional practices

Seeing individual students and their needs has been a key issue in the academic year of 2020-21. This section deals with ways in which pedagogies and instructional practices have been developed, refined and made to fit the increasingly individualised needs of students, which can be hard to predict from previous experiences. These results fall into four groups, as presented in the following, starting with general strokes and then moving into particular aspects of vulnerability, digital technologies and modes of assessment and feedback.

2.2.1 Major challenges and ways of dealing with them

In the 2020-21 academic year, educators and students faced with two major pedagogical challenges: 1. How can class communities be strengthened (and possibly rebuilt) under the restrictions put in place to hinder contagion and subsequent to the first round of school closures? 2. In dealing with another more prolonged phase of school closures since December 2020, how can we overcome the negative effects from absence of familiar human contact? As has been argued above, creating the necessary scaffolding for remote learning has been paramount in securing motivation and resilience, and a key aspect of this has been about making school transparent, flexible and manageable to students. In line with this perspective, a recurring topic for teachers in building stronger class communities and relationships between students and teachers, concerns how teaching resources have been allocated as per class/group of students.

"In the future, the school has decided, we are returning to a 'few-teachers-system', in the sense that we are only part of one team. I'm usually part of two teams. This way, we're teaching one class [group of students] – of course some subjects, such as Crafts and Design, can't avoid teaching several classes, but aside from that we've discovered that we want to return to this system, which had been in place before. And I think our experiences [during the pandemic] have been pushing some buttons in regard to this." (Bettina, fifth grade teacher)

Building class community and creating a 'network of care', so to speak, had been top-priority for Vibeke, who teaches in the fifth grade, and she had come up with a way of creating (or drawing on) a playful narrative around her students' work groups.

"We had been working with The Odyssey and had established groups of sea heroes. And we had distributed phone numbers amongst ourselves so that the sea hero groups could get in touch. And they were tasked with taking care of each other." (Vibeke, fifth grade teacher)

Vibeke's groups of students were mainly assigned with the task of taking care of one another, and this was her perspective as well in giving them work assignments. Her pedagogical reflections concerning this playful approach centre on the point of what groups are *about*:

"Are they about getting work done and crossing it off the list? Sure, but they're very much also about taking care of each other, and by making this point very clear to the children, I think they were inspired to show more empathy when others couldn't muster the energy or motivation to help solve work assignments as much as others. They were taking care of each other and that was their main job in these groups." (Vibeke, fifth grade teacher)

Older students were expected to handle groups formations and dynamics more on their own during periods of remote learning. All ninth-grade students reported using informal message services/boards (mainly Snapchat and Discourse) for organisation of work and peer feedback. Some classmates completely disappeared from this aspect of school life, according to two interviewed students, and teachers were not able to bring them back. On the other hand, some teachers point to some positive aspects of organizing student groups via digital platforms in terms of time-saving aspects when moving from plenary sessions into group sessions and back again. No one needs to move anywhere, making it a flexible pedagogical tool that can be activated on intuition. However, as we have seen, groups are prone to familiar problems in the digital space, and perhaps it is sometimes easier for students to hide from the action when cameras can be turned off and one can 'disappear' rather instantaneously.

2.2.2 Identifying and helping vulnerable students

In the context of this interview-based study, the definition how the term 'vulnerable students' was used is very much up to informants' interpretations. Students were faced with interview questions of whether they themselves felt different in any way, in terms of having special needs or abilities compared to their classmates. They were also asked whether they perceived any of their classmates as different on these accounts and whether they had noticed someone feeling particularly affected by the pandemic circumstances in connection to whichever challenges they might face in their everyday lives. Interestingly, the interviewed students did not have much to say about this topic in terms of talking about individual classmates. One student did, however, mention how a classmate with dyslexia had faced particular challenges, but these had been dealt with accordingly from the first phase of school closures. All of the interviewed students talked about a common feeling of fatigue and challenges to their mental well-being, as put by Kalle, a ninth-grade student:

"We had a 'mood barometer' as a way assessing this, and most students were answering with two out of ten or three out of ten in terms of well-being and such. So that's very low compared to how we're usually feeling." (Kalle, ninth grade student)

Teachers, on the other hand, *did* notice differences in students' capacities to deal with the challenges of pandemic and remote learning. According to Signe, who teaches German and social studies for age group of xx, students appeared affected by the conditions of remote learning across the board, in the sense that previous challenges and performance could not predict whether or not they would feel overwhelmed by school closures. Three teachers mentioned how previously non-attentive students had started to come a bit more out of their

shells during periods of remote learning, but while this appeared interesting to them in terms of creating adapted opportunities for this type of students in the future (see section 2.3.2), they did not indicate revolutionising changes brought on by remote learning for them.

As we have seen from the comment by Lene (in section 2.1.3) breaking isolation was necessary for some students in securing their mental well-being. From her testimony as well of that of teachers, it seems clear that students would not be able to address any such needs on their own initiative. And adding to this the point illustrated by Signe, teacher of 14-15 year-olds, teachers face a complicated task in identifying vulnerable students during the special circumstances brought on by the pandemic, since all types of students appear at risk. Across the interviewed teachers, a common way of offering vulnerable students help, had simply been to invite them back to school – however still using the same online platforms as their classmates at home – which was permitted when parents or teachers saw fit:

"After talking to parents as well as students themselves we have been inviting some students back on campus to support their sense of structure in their everyday school life. Between classes, we have sometimes been taking walks with these students, in order to offer them individual sparring and just letting them know we're here for them to talk to, when things are tough." (Tobias, ninth grade teacher)

In inviting some students back on school premises teachers were left with a situation which might be perceived as hybrid education, but what was actually taking place was a continuation of remote learning but through the VCS classroom. Students attending on-site school were, consequently, doing the same things as those at home during class, using individual devices, but during breaks, they were able to socialise with classmates who were present as well, and talk to their educators in ways such as described above.

Students with cognitive or physical disabilities were outside the scope of this study, yet their challenges are likely more complex than children in regular school environments. Nonetheless, the answers provided by teachers as well as students in this study have shown that vulnerability during the pandemic can also be determined by individual factors that are not easily predicted, in the sense that students, who were previously thriving, lose their motivation. For this reason in particular, we are reminded of the previous point of creating fine-meshed networks of care that notice when someone is not thriving, as this person (student) likely will not feel able to take action by him-/herself. The remote learning environment can facilitate these networks, but when students appeared particularly challenged by these conditions, teachers were able to circumvent school closures and offer them on-site remote learning – albeit in physical classroom.

2.2.3 Digital technologies in the learning environment

Danish school systems were permeated with digital technologies before the pandemic and many schools had more or less moved away from physical textbooks in favour of online learning environments, where assignments and teaching material is accessed using class-issued Google Chromebooks. Consequently, the main novel aspect of digital technologies in education has been the use of video conferencing software (VCS) for remote learning during school closures. The widespread closures affected older students the most, making remote schooling a dominant part of their 2020-21 academic year. A key issue in making this situation work has concerned the matter of mediating one's presence in the online environment (e.g., the Google Meet room). Teachers and students commonly reflect on turning webcams on or off during VCS sessions. Teachers are all in favour of students switching their webcams on, but their views on the relative importance of this and what they can demand of students vary. Some teachers find it necessary to demand that students have their cameras switched on, as it hinders their ability to instruct and perform pedagogical tasks, when students are invisible. Others note the importance of understanding that some students feel very uncomfortable with their camera on for different reasons. For instance, showing one's private surroundings feels unnatural to some, and the work of evaluating one's facial expressions and reacting to others through this kind of mediation can feel exhaustive.

Some students have found ways to circumvent these aspects keep their camera on while circumventing the above-mentioned issues. Backgrounds can be blurred out and one's own 'reflection' can be switched off, but to some, this is not enough. The interviewed fifth graders find it particularly problematic when their classmates refrain from switching their cameras on. Their renditions of this indicate that they feel stranded or alone, and it makes them feel (more) insecure about how others see them in the online environment. When they do group work, however, cameras are rarely off unless someone is experiencing technical difficulties.

When students organise their group work, older students in particular (ninth grade) turn to alternative platforms in doing so, as previously mentioned. At the school of Signe (teacher in the ninth grade), students generally use the message board and VCS system *Discord*, which allows them to establish group rooms and switch seamlessly between contexts in ways that are hypothetically possible in Google and Microsoft environments as well. Yet, *Discord* feels more intuitive and much easier to organise according to some of the interviewed students. Signe mentions that using *Discord* has made group work and scaffolding more "hassle-free", but it has also created problems when students forget to (or refrain from) informing teachers where they are working. One student, Kalle, reported being conscious of which platform he preferred to use, according to context, and he preferred to keep *Snapchat* free from schoolwork:

"If we're doing homework or extended work after school, we usually make our own group call using Google Meet. That usually works. And when we're discussing more friend-related stuff, we turn to Snapchat."
(Kalle, ninth grade student)

In the context of this study, we did not come across any teachers who spoke directly against the use of digital learning material¹³. They were not directly worried about the absence of paper-based material. They were using pen-and-paper-based handouts from time to time (when not in the digital learning environment) and they were also encouraging students to use pen and paper for solving tasks, when it felt relevant. Signe (teacher of eight and ninth grade German and social studies) mentioned how she would choose subscriptions to digital learning material over class sets of books any day of the week:

"The digital material is always fresh and updated to deal with fairly current events. This really helps me keep things relevant for the students and presenting them with meaningful tasks. Also, I can follow their reading and talk to them in reference to how far they've come and what they're struggling with." (Signe, eight and ninth grade teacher)

Even though the remote learning environment appears to affect students across familiar divisional lines between students that are thriving academically or not, teachers perceive some exacerbated difficulties in the remote learning environment:

"Weak students rarely contribute in the online environment. It's the same four students who raise their hand." (Emilie, ninth grade teacher)

Under normal circumstances, when classes take place at school, teachers have the option of using their body in the classroom in ways that invite so-called 'weak students' to participate more. These invitations can be made in empathetic, playful or expectant ways, depending on the situation, but when using the VCS, the mediated body is not afforded the same modes of invitation, leaving teachers with few options during class.

¹³ See more about digital practices in Danish schools here: <https://www.danskeforlag.dk/media/1782/finntogo.pdf>

This brings us to the aspect of digital technologies in education concerning assessments and feedback, which has been treated with special attention in the following.

2.2.4 Assessment and feedback

Teachers as well as students and parents were asked about how assessments of students' performance had been undertaken during the academic year 2020-2021. Final year students (in the ninth grade) have recently been dealt special opportunities in terms of their final exams meaning that their exam grade will only count if it improves their grade from the year. This has removed some of the pressure of exams, however, the interviews for this study took place before this announcement had been made by the Ministry of Education, and therefore students were feeling somewhat anxious about it, and the chair of the student organization was expressing criticism. In addition to the culmination of assessment in final year exams, students are faced with assessments in their everyday lives at school as well from the very beginning, and this section explores some of the reflections that have to do with new aspects of this brought on mainly by the use of digital technologies.

One way of assessing students and giving them feedback on their performance is through the use of more or less prepared oral presentations. During the period with remote learning, students have been permitted to hand in presentations as videoed performances, which has been much to the relief of a particular group of students:

"What lacks from the video approach is the conversation. It's a one-way communication. But provides an option to participate for students who are reluctant to say something with their camera switched on – well, the camera is on here as well, but it's not live." (Signe, eighth and ninth teacher)

As will be discussed in section 2.3.2 of this report, the asynchronous nature of the way in which this type of presentation is carried out leaves teachers and schools with some dilemmas to be handled. Will they offer this mode of presentation in the future and does it sufficiently prepare students for challenges to come?

In the context of plenary VCS sessions of remote learning, fifth grade student, Sebastian, had a comment about dialogical feedback and being able to discuss approaches to how tasks were solved:

"There are some specific teachers, who – you can't just tell them the answer to something and then expect to be told you're right. It's more sort of "why is this true?". They're sort trying more... So you learn more, and I think that's a good way of helping us learn more, so it's not just a matter of knowing the answer and leaving it at that." (Sebastian, fifth grade student)

Sebastian's rendition points to sentiment felt by some students more than others, leaning towards fifth graders more than ninth graders in the sample of this study. He felt that synchronous, plenary feedback sessions were important to feeling a sense of purpose with the work that was being done. Feedback from teachers helped students contextualize their work and seeing how others have approached the given task was usually useful. In connection to this, Sebastian mentioned how he liked the options offered by their digital platform (Microsoft Teams) towards handing in their work and receiving feedback after the session had ended (also to be elaborated in section 2.3.2 of this report). Generally, teachers point to certain advantages in terms of providing written/processual feedback to students in the digital platforms through comments and being able to track their students' progress. This aspect is pointed to as something they would like to bring with them into the next academic year.

2.3 Potential improvements and planning the future

Every informant in this study were, towards the end of the interview, asked about their opinions on how we should learn from the pandemic school and how they would like to see things change during the next academic year as well as long term. The following subsections provide an overview of perceived implications of the 2020-21 academic year on the future. Particularly, aspects of individualization in learning modes, task assignments, feedback and instructions are discussed as well as a general call for stability and, thus, absence of grand reforms.

2.3.1 An overview of implications: 2020-21 and beyond

When asked about recommendations for the near as well as the not-so-near future, the interviewed parties were not exactly keen on revolution – digitally enhanced or otherwise. However, they did have a number of issues and points they wished to address as main learning points from the last year. Teachers generally pointed to familiar topics: more time to prepare, fewer students in each class, shorter days for the students at school. They were generally going through these recommendations with a tone of voice indicating that it had been said many times before, and they did not expect much from mentioning it again. At its core, this recommendation is about adding a considerable number of extra resources to their field, which, teachers argue, is particularly necessary to stay on top of their work with students' mental well-being and motivation. Chair of the organization for students in compulsory education also pleaded for added resources and fewer teachers around each class:

"Of course, it's not realistic that we can offer classes of 10-15 students with two teachers present at each moment, but we can't go back to things as they were before. I've recently had a look at a schedule for a class of first graders, and they were facing eleven different teachers over the course of a week. And I don't think it's okay to present rather young children with this." (Agnes, chair of student organization)

Using outdoor environments and creating options for physical exercise through play and other activities was also a major topic for teachers as well as parents, students and NGOs. Chair of the trade union for private schools had been talking to a school that was considering a permanent share of 20-25% outdoor learning in recognition of the importance felt by their staff (and presumably their students as well). However, teachers recognize differences among their colleagues in terms of being willing to utilize outdoor learning environments – especially during seasons of bad weather. They also acknowledge how differences in subject matter makes it difficult for some teachers to move outside.

In connection to this, teachers and students point to routines of ventilating classes and prioritizing hygiene as things they would like to keep in the future. While it might seem banal, students particularly felt that more frequent ventilation of classrooms was a welcome change since classrooms had often been used by (particularly older) students during breaks. Consequently, coming back to class from recess, the air would be heavy with bodyodour, snacks or other food items. Agnes, from the student organization, also pointed to this as a major point which she had been working for since before the coronavirus arrived.

The 2020-21 academic year has also revealed certain practical advantages to the ways in which digital platforms that were already in place, can be used better. While all interviewed parties preferred going back to on-site school, several students did, however, point to some advantages from the online learning environment:

"I feel like I'm showing more of my work [to my teachers]. Showing that I've gotten things done, and I didn't just do it because I had to, and never got to show it to anyone." (Sebastian, fifth grade student)

This comment from Sebastian had to do with the ways in which their classroom platform (Microsoft Teams) allowed them to hand in assignments and take a look at the work of fellow classmates. If they ran out of time to present their work, it could still be handed in, he argued, providing him with a heightened sense of accomplishment. In the following, we will elaborate on these aspects of individual preferences and how digital technologies can cater to them.

2.3.2 Meeting individual needs of students

Teachers have pointed to the ways in which VCS-based modes of teaching have created new opportunities for students to participate. For instance, several teachers point to the potential in using VCS as a hybrid mode of attending classes taking place at school when students are feeling symptoms that restrict them from physically showing up. In these situations, however, new ethical dilemmas arise in terms of what can be demanded of students who are home due to a (suspected) illness. Schools will have to create a set of guidelines from which a person can understand whether they should consider attending school remotely or focus on getting well. Otherwise, some students may feel unnecessary pressure to perform in fear of falling behind or seeing their grades drop.

A common point of criticism from teachers as well as students has to do with so-called 'long school days', which were introduced with the 2013 reform of public schools. Essentially, the reform called for older students to be at school for 6-7 hours a day and, thus, a lot of homework were to be done on-site in schools as well. Teachers were asked to stay on-site as well, doing their preparational work within normal 'office hours' much to the dissatisfaction of those who treasure flexible work hours. In the context of remote schooling, teachers point to the ways in which the last hours of the school day can be used for individually structured tasks, leaving students free to take a break and returning to their work a bit later, or getting things done as early as possible. Teachers would like to create this option with asynchronous learning material and present older students with the opportunity to choose between going home and working from there at the end of the day, or continue working on-site in school before they go home.

Online learning was found generally useful to structure courses. Several students point to the structured nature of task descriptions that has been developed during the second round of remote schooling as a positive aspect of the pandemic school.

"Handing in homework, and systematic descriptions of tasks, and where to find assignments that has just been lying in different files, psychically, in books and such. And personally, I think that this [new] way of being taught at school is easier to follow. You just log on to My Education, and everything is sorted into easily accessible files instead."
(Kalle, ninth grade student)

Moreover, in line with most other interviewed students, Kalle, age 15, pointed to the convenient ways assignments had been structured as a positive aspect of remote learning, which he would like to keep. As previously mentioned, several of the interviewed students spoke in favour of the structured aspects of receiving feedback from their teachers as well. Asta (fifth grade) has enjoyed the freedom provided to her by remote schooling in terms of being able to vary between solving tasks on her own and seeking peers and her teachers in plenary online space provided by Google Meet:

“ I was able to work by myself, and I could decide whether I wanted to be completely alone and log off, or stay connected to the online meeting.” (Asta, fifth grade student)

Online learning was also signalled as positive for students with certain personality traits but some concerns were raised about if this is positive in pedagogical terms. For instance, another fifth grader, Sebastian, mentioned how he sees himself as a person who does not “gain energy from social situations”, so he also enjoyed being able to work by himself for a certain portion of the day. However, Asta and Sebastian both miss their classmates to play with during breaks.

Essentially, students are asking for more individualisation in the sense that they feel motivated by certain aspects of flexibility in terms of mode that might suit their needs. According to teachers, some students have experienced relief from anxieties as a result of the option to give videoed oral presentations instead of doing them directly in front of the class. All of the teachers who have mentioned this say that they would like to bring this practice with them into the “reopened school” in the future, as they feel it has provided an option for students that were otherwise tormented by this type of semi-public speaking. Even so, we are faced, once more, with questions of whether this type of individualisation is compatible with traditional notions of how compulsory schooling should enculture children into society¹⁴. Should we pursue ways in which individual fears of addressing a group of peers can be relieved or are we, in fact, doing them a disservice? The interviewed teachers also mention how, when faced with both options (video presentation or live presentation via VCS) all of their students chose to record beforehand.

In conclusion, digital learning environments afford different ways in which learning can take place in rather individualised ways. When it comes to giving individual, processual feedback to written work, the positive aspects of these individualised affordances seem to outweigh any negatives, and teachers emphasise how this is something they want to pursue in the future as well – and students have found it very useful. However, we must be able to discuss any negative effects to class communities and education in general that are inadvertently brought on by increases to individual flexibility.

2.3.3 Taking a break from major changes

When asked directly about recommendations for the future, the interviewed parties did not seem keen on revolution. The last decade has been rather tumultuous, as Danish school systems have been facing a series of changes as well as new rules regarding teachers’ working conditions and freedom to decide when and where they wish to work when not teaching. As indicated by virtually everyone, the wish to leave remote schooling behind was at the forefront and going back into a familiar routine was what everyone appeared to want.

Even so, teachers would like to note that this extraordinary period has confirmed their belief in their own abilities to create pedagogical and instructional solutions. Most teachers also mention how annual standardised evaluation of student performance (so-called ‘national tests’), which continue to receive criticism for their inaccuracies and stigmatising effects (e.g. Bundsgaard & Kreiner, 2019), should be downplayed in the near future. This would allow focusing on building class communities, motivation and well-being among other aspects of students’ resilience. National tests, teachers argue, places too much attention on individual performance and shortcomings and cause too much anxiety and feeling of inaccuracy. Put into simple terms: even though some teachable moments have inspired certain changes the near future must be about allowing things to settle down before any major changes are introduced.

¹⁴ The term *dannelse* (akin to the German *Bildung*) is often used to express these aspects of compulsory education.

3 Conclusions and recommendations

The academic year 2020-21 has been marked by transitions from almost-normal school in summer and early autumn 2020, and then back to an extensive period of remote schooling. Results from the interviewed teachers, school leaders and NGOs point to an ad hoc-type strategy in terms of how schools were dealing with the possibility of this happening. Teachers relied on experiences from the first round of closures, but they also made certain efforts to create better scaffolding for the remote learning context and sought to be mindful of students' wellbeing. While students unanimously want to go back to on-site school, they see certain advantages to the remote/online learning situation. Digital platforms and educational tools have provided new routes of offering students individual options for complying with assessment criteria and receiving feedback. When exploring these routes further in the future, educators and policy makers should be mindful of possible pitfalls in terms of individualization at the cost of building resilience and democratic aspects of class/school communities.

Teaching classes outside shows promising potential in terms of building stronger relationships between students and teachers, and creating alternative modes of learning to the classical classroom environment. Some teachers point to the importance of adjusting organizational structures to the flexibility demanded by this way of teaching classes and assigning smaller teams of teachers to each group of students is suggested as a way of dealing with this. Generally, teachers' and students' experiences point to the importance of establishing groups by focusing on networks of care: if a student is unwell in terms of motivation or otherwise, someone will notice and help her/him through it. Teachers have noticed unexpected nuances in the types of students that have been affected more severely than others by the pandemic situation. For this reason, they emphasise the need to work with class communities for the foreseeable future, but also the ability to focus on helping individuals on whichever terms they are struggling.

In conclusion, this study points to potentials in new pedagogical approaches to feedback and assignments using digital platforms. Additionally, facilitating remote learning as a hybrid mode of entering the classroom for students that are otherwise unable to do so (e.g., due to symptoms of illness) has been suggested across informants. At the centre of these ideas and suggestions for the future seems to lie a wish for more flexibility – something which teachers also approach by talking about smaller teams around each class of students, and options to incorporate elements of remote/asynchronous learning. However, importantly, teachers and students are not interested in turning everything upside down – they plead for minor changes in the right direction, but they are mainly interested in returning to normalcy. Moving forward, allowing teachers to come up with their own innovations – also by accessing student perspectives – is most likely a favourable approach.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Methodology

This report is based on 22 semi-structured interviews (details in the next subsection), which were undertaken over the phone and using VCS between March 9th and April 9th, 2021. The sample has focused on children who, in this period, were still unable to attend school on site. Consequently, perspectives regarding remote learning have been foregrounded in this study. As can be seen, efforts have been made to secure the distribution of informants across geographic parameters as well as public/private schools and gender. Efforts were also made to look for students and parents of students who identified as vulnerable in whichever sense, however these efforts remained unsuccessful.

The semi-structured interview followed an interview guide in line with the research questions of the study, which had originally been drafted in English by the international team of experts. Subsequently, the interview guide was translated into Danish and modified to a lesser extent to align the questions with the national context and situation in relation to Covid-19. Audio recordings of the interviews were made, and since imported to the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software *NVivo*. Data were then coded in two cycles through thematic analysis, using a set of codes that had been developed in relation to the research questions. These codes were supplemented by subcodes in relation to developing themes, as reflected by the analytical points presented in this report.

This study presents findings which have been identified as patterns across the answers and reflections offered by the interviewed informants. These insights contribute to our understanding of how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected schools in Denmark, however, the sample cannot represent the collective opinions of stakeholders in Danish compulsory education.

Annex 2. Sample

The sample below reflects some defining aspects of the six teachers, seven students, four parents, two school leaders, two NGO chairs and one trade union chair who were interviewed for this study.

Type	Name	Description
Teacher	Bettina	Female. Suburban public school. Math, Science/Biology and Food Culture in the fifth grade. Suburban school.
Teacher	Signe	Female. Suburban public school. German and Social studies in the eighth and ninth grade
Teacher	Vibeke	Female. Rural public school. History and Danish in the fifth grade.
Teacher	Jonas	Male. Rural private school. Math and Science in the fifth grade.
Teacher	Tobias	Male. Urban public school. Danish and English in the ninth grade.
Teacher	Emilie	Female. Rural school. Math and Physics in the ninth grade.
Student	Viktor	Male. Fifth grade student.
Student	Eleanor	Female. Ninth grade student.
Student	Sebastian	Male. Fifth grade student.
Student	Asta	Female. Fifth grade student.

Student	Kalle	Male. Ninth grade student.
Student	Noah	Male. Ninth grade student.
Student	Melanie	Female. Ninth grade student.
Parent	Mikael	Father (married) of boy in fifth grade and daughter in the eighth grade in suburban area.
Parent	Lene	Mother (divorced) of boy in the ninth grade in urban area.
Parent	Britt	Mother (married) of girls in the sixth and eighth grade in suburban area.
Parent	Jesper	Father (married) of boys in the fifth and ninth grade in rural area.
School leader	Henrik	Male. Large, urban school
School leader	Maria	Female. Moderate size, rural school
NGO	Kristian	Male. Chair of organization working pro-actively with children's rights and well-being.
NGO	Agnes	Female. Chair of organization working for school students' rights and interests.
Trade union	Mikael	Male. Chair of board working for the interests of private schools.

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