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Ethnic school segregation in Copenhagen

A step in the right direction?

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Ethnic school segregation in Copenhagen: A step in the right direction?

Abstract

The Danish school system is based on a general belief in the quality and merits of public schooling. Until 20 years ago, more than 90% of all children attended public school. However, this trend has recently seen a decline due to rising spatial inequalities; nowhere is this more visible than in the major cities, in particular Copenhagen. One visible change has been the rise in the number of children with non-Danish backgrounds in public schools in major cities. Previous studies of Copenhagen showed that, while the level of ethnic residential segregation was moderate, the level of school segregation was remarkably high. The purpose of this paper is to revisit the case of Copenhagen through: a) quantitatively identifying the level of ethnic school segregation in Copenhagen and the change over the last decade, and b) qualitatively analysing the considerations regarding the school choice of parents in an ethnically diverse district. The paper identifies decreasing levels of ethnic school segregation in public schools but a markedly higher and increasing level in private schools. The qualitative material points to still-existing concerns regarding specific public schools with high proportions of pupils of non-Danish backgrounds as well as to parents who choose to overlook such concerns and opt for the local public school.

Keywords: School segregation, ethnic diversity, public schools, private schools

Introduction

Education has become increasingly important for individuals and their lives. Well-educated individuals have better chances in life in terms of employment and income as well as social and health conditions. They live longer, have fewer health problems, earn more money, and seem to be doing better than less educated individuals. Access to the labour market requires growing competences and skills. Consequently, increasing attention is paid to maximising the educational outcomes of children through school choice (Ball, 2003; Brantlinger et al., 1996; Vincent and Ball, 2007). In Denmark, this has heightened the focus on the quality and performance of the local public school and has increased the number of parents who choose a private school or a public school outside their district (Andersson et al., 2010; Rangvid, 2007, 2010). National politicians have used education, especially primary schools and their postulated declining quality, as a new political battlefield. In particular, non-western pupils have been the focus of this discussion.¹ It is reflected in the recently passed *Strategy against parallel societies*, called the ghetto strategy, where one of the six sub-agreements of the strategy addresses challenges of schools in deprived areas (Regeringen, 2018). It involves a) language tests in the first year of school, followed by intensive support for strengthening language

¹ Unfortunately, accessible data on ethnicity only allows a comparison between Danish/non-Danish origin, and grades.

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9 capabilities and summer schools where needed; b) an increased focus on the
10 responsibility of parents for their child's education with the possibility of withdrawing
11 child benefits if children have too-high nonattendance; and c) increased possibilities for
12 the state to sanction and even close schools if they continually underperform. The
13 consequences of the reform for school segregation remain to be seen, as the strategy was
14 passed in November 2018.
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23 Especially in districts with high proportions of children from ethnic minorities, concerns
24 regarding the quality of the local public school have increasingly become a reason for
25 parents to choose private schools or a public school in a different district. In Denmark,
26 this is an urban issue, as people from ethnic minorities make up a substantial proportion
27 of the population in urban areas. Previously, most parents did not consider whether or
28 not their child should attend the local public school; this was a default choice (Rangvid,
29 2007). Private schooling, in contrast, was mostly for children who were sent to boarding
30 school, or whose parents wanted them to attend a school of a specific orientation or
31 religious conviction. In the past, the proportion of pupils in private schools was limited
32 and mostly related to the very upper-class, minor religious groups (e.g. Catholics or
33 Jews), or people with a strong trust in special pedagogic principles, such as those of
34 Rudolf Steiner. Currently, however, new private schools are emerging in bigger cities.
35 Their profile is simply to do better than the local public school by offering lower
36 numbers of pupils per class and a higher quality of schooling (reflected in the level of
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9 grades and test scores). Overall, the growing diversification of the urban population in
10 combination with spatial segregation has challenged the tradition of the public school:
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14 Danish parents living in areas with high-concentration schools [ed: schools with a high
15 concentration of people from ethnic minorities] feel that choosing their local public school is no
16 longer a relevant option (because they fear low academic levels and cultural conflicts) and this
17 conflicts with the much-valued concept that the local public school is the natural choice of school
18 for the overwhelming majority of Danes. (Rangvid, 2007: 1331)
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25 Over the last decades, immigration from non-western countries has increased, which has
26 led to a growing number of children with non-western backgrounds. In school districts
27 with a high proportion of non-western children (whether immigrants or their
28 descendants), increasing concern has been voiced regarding what implications this will
29 have on school quality. In Denmark, most children attend childcare institutions for five
30 full days a week from the age of one. Consequently, nurseries, kindergartens, and
31 schools play important roles in the daily lives of children and are key arenas for intra-
32 ethnic encounters and integration. Thus, it is imperative to track the development of
33 ethnic school segregation and understand the reasons for such segregation.
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47 In 2007, Rangvid identified interesting patterns of ethnic school segregation in
48 Copenhagen: Parental choices result in moderate levels of residential segregation being
49 compatible with high levels of school segregation (Rangvid, 2007). This mirrors the
50 findings of other scholars of ethnic segregation being higher in schools than in
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9 residential areas (Allen, 2007; Burgess et al., 2005; Johnston et al., 2006, 2008). Rangvid
10 called for further research into school segregation in Copenhagen to better understand
11 this. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is two-fold: a) to quantitatively identify the
12 level of ethnic school segregation in Copenhagen and the change over the last decade,
13 and b) to qualitatively analyse the considerations regarding the school choice of parents
14 in an ethnically diverse district. Building on the work by Rangvid, the paper updates
15 data on ethnic school segregation in Copenhagen and adds qualitative findings to
16 understand the considerations behind the school choice of parents in Copenhagen.
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28 The situation in Copenhagen is far from unique. While the level of the division of pupils
29 in the Nordic countries is modest, diversity, school segregation, and difference in
30 performance is increasing (Arnesen and Lundahl, 2006). Sundell (2014) demonstrated a
31 clear correlation between residential segregation and school segregation in Sweden. In
32 particular, small and medium cities show high levels of ethnic segregation and ethnic
33 separation at the school level. A recent study (Kornhall and Bender, 2018) argued that
34 school segregation is now common all over Sweden. In fact, two parallel school systems
35 have emerged: one for well-educated Swedish middle-class families and one for families
36 with foreign backgrounds. A similar pattern can be seen in Norway. Approximately 30%
37 of pupils in the schools of Oslo are of non-Norwegian background. Birkelund et al. (2010)
38 showed a close relation between ethnicity, lack of education among parents, and negative
39 school performance (lower marks and higher drop-out rates); concluding that socio-
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9 economic background was a key factor.
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12 The Nordic welfare states have managed to combine high living standards with relative
13 equality. A key component of the welfare model is the provision of decent housing for
14 all. The strong priority of this objective was achieved during the 1960s and 1970s and
15 produced a huge number of housing units. Around major cities, large social housing
16 estates were constructed. This, in combination with the tradition for district schools,
17 produced socio-economically homogenous schools (Kristensen, 2007). When the ethnic
18 minorities arrived in the 1960s and later, social housing was the only accessible sector for
19 them. As the middle class began to buy rather than rent housing in the same period, the
20 residualisation of social housing began. The middle class and many workers with a
21 majority background moved out of the social housing estates and left an increasingly
22 marginal population behind (Madsen and Hornstrup, 2000). People who were single,
23 ethnic minorities, retired early, and inactive in the labour market became a dominant
24 portion of the tenants in many estates. Thus, segregation at the school level took place
25 despite huge welfare expenditures.
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48 **Danish education system** 49

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52 The Danish public school is known as *Folkeskolen*, meaning ‘the school of the people’.
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54 Public education in Denmark has been provided by the state since 1814, when
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9 elementary education became mandatory. Folkeskolen covers the obligatory ten years
10 of schooling from the year a child turns six, comprising both primary and lower
11 secondary school. Education in public schools is free of charge. Primary schools are
12 district schools, meaning that all children living in a given district have the right to attend
13 that district's municipal school. Overall, close to 77% of all pupils attend Folkeskolen
14 (2016). However, the proportion attending a private school has increased by 50% over
15 the last 20 years.²
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26 The introduction of parental choice in 2005 has weakened the tradition of the district
27 school. Children are still secured a place in the district school, but parents have the
28 possibility of choosing another school. A central element in the 2005-reform was to
29 provide easily accessible information on school quality to assist parents in choosing a
30 school. Information is available online and allows for comparison between schools
31 (www.uddannelsesstatistik.dk). Information includes grades and the number of teaching
32 hours, staff, and pupils in each class. Unfortunately, the published data do not include
33 socio-economic background, and the 'quality' of each individual school is simply
34 measured through student marks. While these data attract much attention, the effect on
35 parental choice is moderated by the right to attend the local district school. Children
36 from other parts of the city or other municipalities may attend a school if vacant seats
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53 ² Figures from the database of the Danish Ministry for Economic Affairs and the Interior.
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9 are available. Public schools that have good reputations are popular and less frequently
10 opted out of by parents from the district, resulting in fewer empty seats. Rangvid (2010)
11 showed that, despite this, half of the children of Copenhagen were affected by school
12 choice, meaning that their parents choose a different school than their local district
13 school. In half of these cases, the choice was a public school outside the district, and the
14 other half chose a private school.
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24 The authorities monitor the quality of private schools, but they may organise their
25 teaching and disciplines as they wish, as long as their pupils' competences match the
26 competences of those in the public-school system. The state partly finances private
27 schools by covering 75% of the average cost per public school pupil. The rest is paid by
28 parents, sometimes supplemented by donations from foundations.
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36 According to the official statistics from the Danish Ministry of Education, the number
37 of public schools has fallen by 24% over the last two decades. This is largely caused by
38 the merging of small rural schools. During the same period, the number of private
39 schools has risen by 20% for several reasons. First, parents fear insufficient educational
40 quality in public schools, which may threaten their children's future life chances.
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9 to speaking another language at home. Third, the growing diversification of the
10 population has led to an increasing demand for special considerations and more time for
11 the individual child. The latter is difficult due to budget pressure in the public sector,
12 which has resulted in increasing class sizes in public schools. Fourth, local government
13 reform in 2007 forced local governments to reduce their budgets. One method of
14 achieving this has been to merge or close small schools, thus reducing the cost per pupil.
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16 A recurrent reaction from local communities has been to transform the village school
17 into a so-called free school, a private school, to provide a local schooling option. The
18 first three reasons have affected Copenhagen, while the latter happens primarily in
19 depopulated areas.
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36 *Increasing attention to educational outcome*

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39 Over the last decades, the educational system has attracted increasing attention, becoming
40 a key battlefield of modern politics in many countries (Ball, 2001; Brantlinger et al.,
41 1996). Education and competence fit for intensified international competition have
42 become cornerstones in national strategies. This reflects and is reflected in the rising
43 attention among parents who see education as the key factor in determining the future
44 possibilities of their children. As a consequence of the strong focus on educational
45 outcome, the quality of schools has received ever-increasing attention (Pedersen, 2011).
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9 Researchers point to the decline of the welfare state in favour of educational consumerism
10 and individualism (Beach and Sernhede, 2011).
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14 Schools are a strong marker of the socio-spatial differentiation of urban space (Gibbons
15 and Telhaj, 2007) with school reputation drastically affecting the recruitment of pupils.
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17 In contrast to working-class parents, middle-class parents are active choosers who have
18 managed to maintain their relative privilege in terms of access to high-quality education
19 through parental choice (Butler and Robson, 2003). Consequently, middle-class families
20 either attempt to keep a distance from working-class residential districts (Sibley, 1995),
21 or choose a school outside the catchment area (Butler and Robson, 2003). Thus, while
22 tendencies towards decreasing residential segregation can be identified, this is coupled
23 with an increasing segregation in relation to institutions, consumption, and leisure
24 activities (Burgess et al., 2005; Rangvid, 2007).
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38 The issue of segregation is of major importance in discussions of school quality. Parents
39 react to the perceived quality of individual schools based on school reputation, which
40 largely depends on the social composition of the school. Consequently, the social and
41 ethnic milieus of schools become central parts of school reputations. For pupils of non-
42 Danish origin, schools are important for their integration, as they are key arenas for
43 encountering mainstream society norms and values (Alwan, 2015; Rangvid, 2007).
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52 Among both politicians and parents, this has caused concern regarding schools with a
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9 high proportion of ethnic minority pupils (Boterman, 2013; Johnston et al., 2008).

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12 Rangvid (2007, 2010) showed that one outcome of these processes in Copenhagen was a
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14 rising separation at the institutional level but without the same drastic rise in residential
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16 segregation. Parental choice between public schools and the supply of private schools
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18 enables families to remain in mixed neighbourhoods without being forced to send their
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20 children to a less attractive school. This illustrates the phrase ‘close together and worlds
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22 apart’ (Bourne, 1993). Despite socially and ethnically mixed neighbourhoods, cross-
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24 cutting interaction is limited.
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32 **Methods and data**

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36 The quantitative data originate from official, public statistical databases, primarily the
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38 national Statistics Denmark (www.Statistikbanken.dk). Statistics Denmark collects data
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40 regularly for the entire country, most of which are produced for administrative purposes.
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42 The Ministry of Education has established an online data service with detailed
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44 information on individual schools and their pupils, including information on grades, well-
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46 being, and nonattendance (www.uddannelsesstatistik.dk). This is coupled with data from
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48 Statistics Copenhagen, covering the City of Copenhagen (www.kk.dk/statistik). Data are
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50 not available at a detailed level, nor is it possible to find figures for special social groups
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9 without special data deliverables. However, the Danish Registers offer a vast quantity of
10 publicly accessible data, which has been utilised for this paper.
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14 The qualitative material originates from the Danish part of the major European research
15 project DIVERCITIES³. One part of the project focused on the residents' perception of
16 and experience with diversity. While school segregation was not a stated focus of the
17 interviews, the interviews clearly point to patterns and challenges with school segregation
18 in the district. For parents in a diverse district, school choice is clearly an imperative
19 concern and a main aspect of living with diversity. Thus, while school segregation was
20 not a predefined theme in the interview guide, it became a central theme in the material.
21 Herein lies the potential of a qualitative approach, allowing for unanticipated themes to
22 emerge. The paper draws on a subsection of the 50 qualitative interviews with residents
23 of Bispebjerg, namely the 35 who were parents. Of these, 18 had children living at home,
24 and these constitute the main basis of the analysis in this paper, supplemented with input
25 from other interviewees. When recruiting interviewees, the goal was to reflect the
26 different population groups in Bispebjerg. Accordingly, prototypical groups mirroring the
27 diversification processes of the district were identified and used to steer recruitment. The
28 goal of the sampling method was not to construct a representative sample but to ensure
29 that the different groups were included. Further information can be found in Skovgaard
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³ For more information see: <https://www.urbandivercities.eu/>.
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9 Nielsen et al., 2016.

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12 *School segregation in Copenhagen*
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15 The majority of Copenhagen schools have relatively few pupils. A fifth have fewer than
16 100 pupils, and only three schools have more than 1,000 pupils. In Copenhagen
17 Municipality, 70% of children attend one of the 63 public schools at the primary/lower
18 secondary level. The rest attend one of the 57 private schools. Even though the number
19 of pupils in private schools is still less than half of that of public schools, the number of
20 choices available for private schooling is almost as high as that for public schools.
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30 >> **Insert Figure 1 here**
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33 The proportion of pupils with a non-Danish background⁴ varies substantially between
34 Copenhagen districts. Bispebjerg and Brønshøj-Husum have the highest proportions
35 (43.3% and 35.7%, respectively; see Figure 1). The ethnic composition has challenged
36 the traditional organisation of the public-school system, as it has caused many Danish
37 parents to opt out of their local district school. Their solutions have been to choose a
38 private school or a different public school or to move to a less ethnically mixed
39 neighbourhood. The outcome has been a sharp increase in the proportion of pupils with
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53 ⁴ The statistics do not allow the recording of ethnicity, only a distinction between Danish, Western, and
54 non-western residents.
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9 non-Danish backgrounds in some public schools and intensified attempts to find new
10 ways of avoiding ethnically divided schools. In the school year 2016/17, eight schools in
11 Copenhagen had no pupils with a Danish background, and in 25 schools less than 40% of
12 the pupils had a Danish background. At the other extreme, about 20 schools had no pupils
13 with a non-Danish background, and 68% had less than 20% of pupils with a non-Danish
14 background. However, if we delve into this development over the last decade, we find
15 signs of change towards less ethnic school segregation.
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29 Table 1 reveals an important change in the pupil composition. The relative proportion of
30 pupils with a non-Danish background peaked in the 2000s and has slowly declined since
31 then. The reason for this is the growth in the number of pupils with a Danish background,
32 which increased by 31% during the period 2010-2016, and a decrease in the number of
33 pupils with a non-Danish background (-6.5%), despite an overall increase in the size of
34 the non-Danish population of Copenhagen (from 17% in 2000 to 24% in 2017). This in
35 itself has reduced ethnic segregation. The main cause of this change is the population
36 growth of younger Danish households caused by the improved housing conditions in
37 combination with a growth in the housing stock of larger dwellings suitable for families
38 (Andersen, 2017). Additionally, serious attempts made by the authorities to reduce school
39 segregation have further diminished segregation at the school level. The index of
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9 dissimilarity has fallen from 0.5 to 0.46 for all schools within the City of Copenhagen
10 (2010-2016). However, the ethnic segregation level between municipal schools was lower
11 than that between private schools, increasing moderately since 2010 in private schools
12 and decreasing in public schools.
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19 An ethnic division between schools in Copenhagen has existed for some years. Table 2
20 shows a modest decline in segregation between pupils with Danish and non-Danish
21 backgrounds from 2010/11 to 2016/17 from 0.49 to 0.46. However, it also demonstrates
22 a separation between groups. The index of isolation at the school level was 0.6 in 2010/11
23 for Danish pupils. This index shows the probability that a Danish student will randomly
24 meet another Danish student. Non-western pupils were less isolated with an index of 0.5.
25 In Bispebjerg, however, the index of isolation was 0.8 for Danish pupils. These figures
26 suggest that schools are mixed across ethnic background only to a limited degree. The
27 number of pupils with non-Danish backgrounds has decreased both at district level and
28 within the private school sector, while the number of Danish pupils has increased during
29 the same period. Thus, the declining level of segregation is reflected in municipal schools,
30 while the slight increase in segregation in private schools reveals that ethnic minorities
31 utilise their right to form private schools. With a few exceptions, the private schools in
32 Bispebjerg are faith-based schools.
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52 Overall, ethnic school segregation has dropped, even if only by a little. The proportion
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9 of pupils with non-Danish backgrounds peaked a decade ago and is now at the level of
10 the 1990s. The number of Danish pupils has increased over the same period. In
11 combination, this has reduced both the proportion of non-Danish pupils as well as the
12 segregation level in general. The establishment of ethnic private schools has, however,
13 produced a high level of segregation in private schools.
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24 *Evidence from a Copenhagen district*

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28 To understand the processes behind ethnic school segregation and the considerations of
29 parents involved in school choice in Copenhagen, the following section of the paper
30 analyses qualitative evidence from the district of Bispebjerg. Bispebjerg is interesting,
31 as it has the highest proportion of pupils with non-Danish backgrounds and offers more
32 private than public schools.
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44 *Diversity and school segregation of Bispebjerg*

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48 Copenhagen consists of 10 districts. The district of Bispebjerg lies in the northern part
49 of the city and houses about 55,000 inhabitants (2017). It has a highly diverse residential
50 composition, both ethnically and socio-economically (Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 2016).
51 A substantial proportion of the area housing is social housing, which remains the main
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9 tenure for ethnic minorities in Denmark (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017). The different waves
10 of immigration to Denmark have affected the area as well, leading to a high level of
11 ethnic diversity (Table 3).
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20 A substantial proportion of Bispebjerg is categorised as deprived by Copenhagen
21 Municipality. The municipality's definition is based on a combination of the following
22 indicators: small housing units (<60 m²), housing units with installation deficiencies,
23 residents with non-western origins, residents outside of the workforce, residents with
24 modest or no education, and residents with a low income (Copenhagen Municipality
25 2011). Growing segmentation (Lindberg and Linden, 1989) has produced marked social
26 differentiation within the district. Although segregation in Copenhagen is still at a
27 modest level, the differences between various forms of ownership are significant. An
28 increasing challenge in Denmark over the last decades has been the concentration of
29 disadvantaged and ethnic minorities in the social housing sector, a tendency that is also
30 seen in Copenhagen. While the Danish social housing sector is aimed, in principle, at
31 the general mass of the population, it has, in reality, increasingly become social housing
32 (Skovgaard Nielsen and Haagerup, 2017). The district of Bispebjerg is a diverse but
33 divided district. Two key reasons are that ethnic minorities are generally overrepresented
34 in social housing (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017) and that, on average, the socio-economic
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9 situation of ethnic minorities is worse than that of the Danish majority. Consequently,
10 socio-economic spatial segregation leads to ethnic spatial segregation. The spatial
11 segregation is reflected in public schools, as some schools cater primarily to affluent
12 residents and others to the less affluent, causing the percentages of ethnic minority
13 children to vary substantially between schools.
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21 The district of Bispebjerg is home to 13 schools, of which eight are private schools. While
22 the majority of the schools are private, the smaller sizes of the private schools cause their
23 proportion of pupils to be just below 30%. The proportion of pupils attending a private
24 school has increased slightly from 2010/11 to 2016/17, from 24% to 28%. The number
25 of pupils in Bispebjerg remained stable during the period 2010-2016, and the ethnic
26 balance between pupils of Danish and non-Danish background was relatively constant.
27 Pupils with non-Danish backgrounds make up approximately 44%. While the proportion
28 varies from 30 to 67% in public schools, the variation is between 0% and 85% within
29 private schools. The ethnic composition in private schools is thus strongly polarised and
30 reflects the existence of several Muslim schools and a Jewish school in the district.
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45 From 2010/11 to 2016/17, ethnic segregation between schools in the district of Bispebjerg
46 diminished slightly from 0.24 to 0.16 for municipal schools and from 0.35 to 0.26 for
47 private schools (Table 2). Thus, contrary to much debate and ‘conventional wisdom’,
48 ethnic segregation is slowly declining. However, the more surprising fact is that ethnic
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9 segregation at the school level is much lower within the ethnically mixed district of
10 Bispebjerg than at the city level. The percentage of bilingual pupils varies immensely
11 between the five public schools of Bispebjerg, ranging from 28% at Holberg School in
12 Emdrup and 33% at Utterslev School to 76% at Tagensbo School (Bakalus, 2014). While
13 the percentage of bilingual pupils in Tagensbo School is much higher than the average
14 percentage of ethnic minorities in Bispebjerg, it corresponds approximately to the
15 proportion of ethnic minorities in the school district of Tagensbo School. Thus, in this
16 case, ethnic school segregation reflects ethnic spatial segregation.
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28 *Parental perceptions of public schools*

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31 As described in the method section, the recruitment of interviewees was based on an
32 attempt to achieve a broad sample of the different groups in Bispebjerg. The diversity of
33 the interviewees in general is mirrored in the group of parents in the sample. They are
34 of mixed ethnic backgrounds and ages, have different socio-economic positions, and
35 have lived in the district for varying years. Across these differences, the proportion of
36 ethnic minority pupils is mentioned by the parents as a main concern regarding public
37 schools.
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48 Not to sound racist, but I think that there are a lot of immigrant children out here who don't know
49 how to behave the way that we want our children to behave. (Female, 25, works in a bakery,
50 ethnic Danish background, social housing)
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9 [Describes how changes to the school district changed the ethnic composition of her son's school
10 prior to his enrolment]: I thought that was really cool because I would have had a terribly bad
11 conscience if I had had to say that we were going to move our son because we don't want him to
12 go [to school] with all those immigrants. (Female, 43, export adviser, German-Polish
13 background, owner-occupied housing)
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19 Ethnic pupil composition is also a concern among ethnic minority parents, and concerns
20 like the above are expressed by minority parents as well. They express a wish for their
21 children to interact with children of Danish origin in order for them to get to know Danes
22 and Danish society. This could be a reason for the decreasing isolation index of the
23 quantitative material.
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32 Some of the interviewees expressed ambivalence regarding school choice. On one hand,
33 they support the public school in principle and would ideally want their children to attend
34 the local public school. On the other hand, when the local school is perceived as
35 challenged, they are not prepared to enrol their child in the school or at least are very
36 concerned about doing so. It becomes a conflict between principles and concerns
37 regarding the well-being and education of the child:
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47 But again, the paradox is that we all in a way want to save the public school. But when it comes
48 to our own children, then that wasn't really what we meant [when we said we wanted to save the
49 public school]. It wasn't them [their own children] that were to save the public school. (Female,
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9 30s, social housing+⁵)
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12 In Bispebjerg, school segregation is closely related to the reputation of the specific
13 schools. Three public schools are especially referred to in the material. Interviewees
14 living in the school districts of Holberg and Utterslev feel comfortable with sending their
15 children to the local school, whereas this is not the case for interviewees living in the
16 district of Tagensbo School. Although improvements to the social and educational
17 environments at Tagensbo School are acknowledged by the interviewees, accounts of a
18 fragile social order and a harsh environment are expressed by all parent interviewees
19 living in the district, whether or not their children attend Tagensbo School:
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31 We were convinced that he was going to go to Utterslev School, as this is about 100 metres closer
32 and because it is a great school. So, it was like: “Yippee, he will be going to Utterslev School!”
33 But then we got that letter [from the municipality] that now the child is starting school and then
34 it was Tagensbo. My girlfriend was almost in tears; I think actually she did cry. And then all the
35 parents from our housing association were out on the stairs [discussing the matter] and set up
36 Facebook groups: “What are we going to do?” Because no one had really heard anything good
37 about that school. (Female, 30s, social housing+)
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46 Some interviewees have chosen, despite concerns, to enrol their children in Tagensbo
47 School. This was the case for the interviewee quoted above. She is a member of a group
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52 ⁵ Social housing+ is a new type of social housing that attracts comparatively more-affluent residents than
53 regular social housing. The units are relatively big but are made cheaper by leaving some of the internal
54 fixtures (i.e. domestic appliances) and the daily maintenance to the residents.
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9 of residents in a newly built social housing estate aimed at more-affluent residents. The
10 residents are predominantly young families with children, are well-educated with stable
11 employment, and have many personal and social resources. There is a comprehensive
12 social life within the estate among children and adults alike, and the residents provide
13 mutual support for each other. A large group of these residents made the common
14 decision to send their children to Tagensbo School, despite its poor reputation. This
15 finding mirrors that of Boterman (2013), who identifies a strategy of the ‘mixing’ of
16 ‘black schools’ in Amsterdam, with more highly educated native Dutch parents agreeing
17 to simultaneously send their children to the same neighbourhood school to change the
18 pupil composition of the school. Vowden (2012) described this as a strategy of safety in
19 numbers in a study of middle-class parents of primary school children in London. Social
20 mix is acceptable and even desirable, provided that the majority or a substantial minority
21 were from middle-class white backgrounds, and the overwhelming majority were
22 proficient in English when starting school (Vowden, 2012). This could be another cause
23 of the decreasing segregation identified quantitatively.
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44 Several interviewees who have chosen to enrol their children in Tagensbo School despite
45 their concerns were positively surprised, saying that the school does not live up to its
46 doubtful reputation. For other interviewees, Tagensbo’s reputation and their own
47 concerns about the school have caused them to either choose a private school or make
48 plans to move. To some, the school district was crucial in their choice of housing
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9 purchase: 'I don't know if we would have bought it if it had belonged to Tagensbo
10 School down there' (female, 36, management consultant, ethnic Danish background,
11 owner-occupied housing).
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16 One of the challenges arising from the school segregation of Bispebjerg is that it limits
17 the potential in a neighbourhood to foster diverse social relations and social cohesion.
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19 As the majority of children in Denmark attend childcare institutions five full days a week
20 from the age of one, nurseries, kindergartens, and subsequently schools play important
21 roles in the daily lives of children. In diverse neighbourhoods, such institutions can
22 function as key arenas for encounters across differences: 'My schooldays were a good
23 experience, because we were such a mix in my class. We were all so different that we
24 simply just had to accept each other, and we're still like that today' (female, 25, in
25 vocational training, Ghanaian background, cooperative housing).
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38 In most cases, the children of the interviewees attend schools and institutions located in
39 their own neighbourhood. Some parents identify a certain grouping among the children
40 along socio-economic and, to some extent, ethnic lines. However, they also see the
41 formation of friendships across differences. The local institutions provide arenas for the
42 children to engage in diversified activities and relations (Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 2016).
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44 However, this requires a fairly equal representation in these arenas of the diverse
45 neighbourhood groups:
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9 The thing is, if all the children are taken out of their neighbourhood [school], this will have a
10 very negative effect on the way we relate to one another, as we will not know each other so well.
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12 So, it's actually quite important. (female, 38, consultant, ethnic Danish background, owner-
13 occupied house)
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18 *Initiatives to change the patterns and effects of school segregation*
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21 Copenhagen Municipality considers school segregation along socio-economic and
22 ethnic lines to be an increasing problem. The 'Action Plan for the Inclusion Policy' by
23 the Children and Youth Administration (2011) states the following as one of its two
24 main goals (the other being that all children regardless of ethnic and social backgrounds
25 achieve the qualifications necessary to obtain upper secondary education and gain access
26 to the labour market):
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35 To create the best possible distribution of the city's children in childcare institutions and schools
36 within the given frames with an aim to enhance the relations between children and their parents
37 across ethnic and social backgrounds in order to strengthen the social integration and create a
38 city marked by acquaintance, understanding and tolerance between the residents of the city. (The
39 Children and Youth Administration, 2011)
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46 To counter school segregation, the municipality has altered the public-school districts
47 more than once in recent years. Different boundaries between districts have been drawn
48 to cut across the segments of the housing market. Since social classes, to some degree,
49 separate spatially due to segmentation in the housing market, economic capacity and
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9 personal choice are reflected in the socio-economic distribution of pupils among schools.

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11 To counter the socio-economically unequal distribution of pupils, the municipality has
12 redrawn school district boundaries to create more mixed schools by ensuring that the
13 districts cover different housing types with different types of residents. The challenge is
14 that parents are not blind consumers of schools. The most resourceful parents especially
15 have the economic and social resources to choose private schools if the districts are
16 changed in a way that causes their children to belong to a school of which they do not
17 approve. While on the drawing board new districts might lead to a new 'recruitment
18 area' for a given school, an actual change in pupil composition requires that the parents
19 choose their local school. The high proportion of pupils affected by school choice in
20 Copenhagen suggests that they do not automatically choose their local school. The
21 solution thus does not seem to have the desired effect, at least not if it is not coupled
22 with other efforts (e.g. to change the image of specific schools).
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40 The municipality has made physical improvements and management changes in poor-
41 reputation schools to address the actual challenges in these schools and to change their
42 reputation. Based on the evidence from Bispebjerg, reputation seems to be the most
43 imminent challenge to tackle to avoid school segregation. Furthermore, policy initiatives
44 have been taken to create ethnically mixed schools in Copenhagen, or at least reduce the
45 ethnic segregation between schools. The 'Action Plan for Inclusion Policy' is aimed at
46 increasing diversity in municipal schools by distributing bilingual children across
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9 schools throughout the city (Skovgaard Nielsen et al., 2016). Attempts at changing the
10 distribution of bilingual children were introduced in 2004 under the name of magnet -
11 schools (later ‘The Copenhagen Model’ in 2007). School-starting bilingual children
12 belonging to school districts with a high proportion of bilingual children are offered a
13 place in a school with a low proportion of bilingual children. At the same time, schools
14 with a high proportion of bilingual children are given additional resources, and new
15 interesting profiles for these schools are created to increase the proportion of Danish
16 parents who choose the school. Municipal public relations campaigns have, in various
17 ways, been aimed at changing the reputation of specific schools and convincing parents
18 to choose their local public school.
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33 When this policy was first introduced, the municipal administration relocated all
34 bilingual children, regardless of whether they had linguistic challenges (Skovgaard
35 Nielsen et al., 2016). However, this resulted in substantial criticism from the public, who
36 deemed the programme discriminatory. Thus, the programme now relocates all children
37 with linguistic challenges, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Even though many of
38 the children in the programme are from non-western backgrounds, this has improved the
39 programme’s effectiveness, as only children who actually have linguistic difficulties are
40 included. The focus of the ghetto strategy on public schools in deprived housing areas
41 will increase the focus on language capabilities of school starters. However, parental
42 concerns over concentration schools (see Rangvid, 2007, quoted in the introduction) are
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9 also about cultural conflicts and these are not solved through language programmes.
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12 Supplementing the municipal initiatives, the parental association ‘Use Your Local
13 School’ is a voluntary initiative aimed at getting Copenhagen parents to choose their
14 local public school. The association has parents who have chosen the municipal school
15 relay their experience to affluent parents of school-starting children. One part of this is
16 to counter the bad reputation of specific schools and the criticism of the academic level
17 at public schools. Another is to ensure that parents of preschool children become familiar
18 with the local school and establish contact between local families before their children
19 start school. However, dependence on involvement and commitment from local parents
20 has proven a potentially fragile construction in disadvantaged areas (e.g. Bispebjerg).
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34 At the same time, religious private schools for primarily ethnic minority children are
35 potentially creating a separate school system with a low level of integration of pupils of
36 Danish and non-Danish backgrounds. While the municipal efforts so far have focused
37 on ethnic distribution across public schools and the school choice of more-affluent
38 Danish parents, future efforts might need to focus on getting ethnic minority parents to
39 choose their local public school. It is paradoxical that, while the efforts have focused on
40 Danish parents, the challenges emerging might refer to a greater extent to the choices of
41 ethnic minority parents.
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Conclusion

In Denmark, ethnic school segregation has been on the public agenda for a long time because of a rising number of ethnic minority inhabitants. This is predominantly an urban issue, as the concentration of people with ethnic minorities is highest in the cities. In 2007, Rangvid concluded that, while the overall level of ethnic segregation in Copenhagen was relatively moderate, the segregation of pupils due to ethnic background between schools was surprisingly high, approaching the level of US cities.

Since Rangvid's study, important changes have taken place. First, the population of Copenhagen has grown considerably. This population growth is predominantly due to the increasing number of children of Danish descent. Second, the overall proportion of school-aged children with non-Danish backgrounds in Copenhagen is declining. The general improvement of the city and its dwellings has increased the city's attractiveness and transformed districts into more middle-class areas. At the same time, active policies have been implemented to reduce segregation, such as convincing parents of near-school-age children to choose their local public school, redrawing school district boundaries, securing a more equal distribution of bilingual children, and changing the bad reputations of specific schools. The qualitative material shows that the image of specific schools, in particular the proportion of ethnic minorities, is a key concern of parents. However, the interviews also identify attempts to go against public opinion and choose the local public

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9 school, even if the perception of the public regarding the school is negative.
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12 An important shift since the 1990s is the reduced emigration of well-educated middle-
13 class families from Copenhagen. This change, primarily due to the refurbishment of
14 housing, in combination with the transfer of large parts of the private rented sector into
15 cooperatives and owner-occupied housing, has increased the proportion of young middle-
16 class families living in Copenhagen (cf. Andersen, 2017). Gentrification has changed the
17 residential composition of neighbourhoods and, consequently, the composition of the
18 children of corresponding catchment areas. At the same time, while the non-Danish
19 population of Copenhagen has increased during the last two decades, the proportion of
20 pupils with a non-Danish origin has decreased. A more restrictive immigration policy has
21 reduced the number of younger immigrants and hence the number of children. These
22 changes have affected the distribution of ethnic minorities at the school level, leading to
23 diminished levels of school segregation. Available statistics show a minor decline at the
24 city level, while Bispebjerg, which has the highest proportion of pupils with non-Danish
25 backgrounds, has experienced a major reduction in ethnic school segregation in both
26 public and private schools.
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48 Before dismissing the challenge of separate learning, however, the index of isolation
49 should be considered. This index is generally quite high for Danish pupils, especially in
50 the Bispebjerg district despite the moderate dissimilarity index. This reveals a remarkable
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9 development over recent years: the majority of pupils in private schools are mostly of
10 non-Danish backgrounds, while Danish pupils dominate municipal schools. Thus, within
11 each sector, the ethnic composition is relatively homogenous. This warrants an increased
12 focus in the coming years on ethnic school segregation within private and public schools
13 with specific attention regarding the reasons for and consequences of parental choice
14 among ethnic minority parents.
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29
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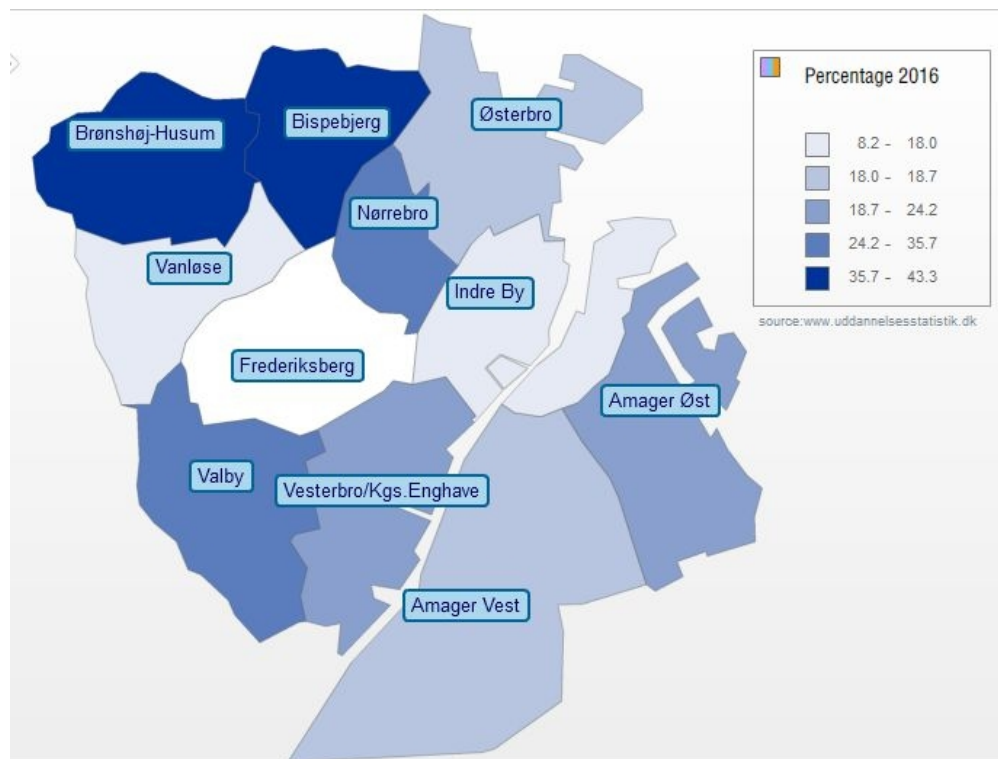


Figure 1: Proportion of pupils with a non-Danish background in municipal schools in Copenhagen, district level, 2016 (Frederiksberg Municipality excluded).

Source: www.uddannelsesstatistik.dk.

Non-Danish background: a person who was not born in Denmark or who does not have a parent with Danish citizenship (Statistics Denmark).

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Table 1: Number and proportion of pupils with non-Danish background 2010-2017 in schools in Copenhagen Municipality

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Danish pupils	31867	32659	34091	35379	37017	38566	40010	41635
Non-Danish pupils	14249	14114	13998	13805	13770	13559	13004	12905
Unknown	205	209	219	297	532	518	572	604
Total	46321	46982	48308	49481	51319	52643	53586	55144
Non-Danish/unknown (%)	30.9	30.2	29.1	28.1	27.1	26.0	24.5	23.7

Source: Uddannelsesstatistik.dk

Table 2: Index of dissimilarity and isolation for schools in Copenhagen Municipality and Bispebjerg district

Copenhagen	2010/11	2016/17
Index of dissimilarity, all schools	0.49	0.46
Index of dissimilarity, public schools	0.40	0.35
Index of dissimilarity, private schools	0.67	0.69
Index of isolation (DK)	0.66	0.63
Index of isolation (ND)	0.52	0.44
Bispebjerg	2010/11	2016/17
Index of dissimilarity, all schools	0.39	0.31
Index of dissimilarity, public schools	0.24	0.16
Index of dissimilarity, private schools	0.35	0.26
Index of isolation (DK)	0.79	0.81
Index of isolation (ND)	0.52	0.40

DK= Danish, ND= Pupils with non-Danish backgrounds.

Source: www.uddannelsesstatistik.dk

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Table 3: Ethnic diversity in Denmark, Copenhagen and Bispebjerg, 2017

	Denmark	Copenhagen	Bispebjerg
Danish origin	87.1%	75.6%	66.0%
Immigrants, western (incl. EU-27)	4.1%	8.4%	8.3%
Descendants, western	0.5%	0.9%	1.0%
Immigrants, non-western	5.8%	10.2%	16.5%
Descendants, non-western	2.5%	4.9%	8.1%
Children aged 6-15, Danish origin	88.1%	76.8%	55.5%
Children aged 6-15, western origin	2.1%	3.5%	4.1%
Children aged 6-15, non-western origin	9.7%	19.7%	40.4%

Source: Copenhagen Statistical Bank (2017) and StatBank Denmark (2017).