

# Vesturbyggð School Policy

November 2014

While deciding the 2014 budget, the town council of Vesturbyggð recently approved a plan according to which a school policy project would be drafted for the municipality. Work on the project commenced early in 2015. The policy encompasses preschool, elementary school and music school, and is shaped in accordance with laws on preschools and elementary schools. Ingvar Sigurgeirsson, professor at the University of Iceland, served as coordinator for the project and conducted preliminary interviews with school staff, students and parents in order to initiate the policy making process. Moreover, a project management team was organized, comprised of members of the education committee. The following individuals sat on the committee up until June 2014: Gerður Björk Sveinsdóttir, chairman, Leifur Ragnar Jónsson, Jóhann Pétur Ágústsson, Hjörtur Sigurðsson and Friðbjörg Mattíasdóttir. As of the new election year, the committee is composed of Gerður Björk Sveinsdóttir, chairman, Hjörtur Sigurðsson, Guðrún Eggertsdóttir, Þórður Sveinsson and Birna Friðbjört Hannesdóttir Stephensen. Ásthildur Struludóttir, Vesturbyggð town mayor, has also worked with the group.

Schools are at the heart of every society and citizens should be able to pride themselves in activities that take place within the schools. Furthermore, requirements should be in place that ensure that schools are ambitious, and keep pace with the developments of society and general advancements. In choosing where to live, the quality of schools is a major concern. Outstanding schools provide municipalities a competitive edge. Vesturbyggð should run outstanding schools. The population of Vesturbyggð has rapidly grown in recent years to which the preschools and elementary schools have responded by increasing the size of staff and facilities. The town council has unanimously agreed that the municipality's schools take priority in the budgets. School funding in the municipality has been considerably expanded with improvements in facilities and technology. However, the most significant element is a fruitful school-parent cooperation; that parents actively participate in their children's schooling and that they are aware of what takes place in the schools. In this way, we build an ambitious and successful school environment.

Ásthildur Sturludóttir

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## Priority Projects

The most significant aspects of Vesturbyggð's educational matters, are the following

- Improve working conditions in preschools, bolster their professionalism and increase positions of trained specialists.
- Strengthen cooperation between the schools and parents, and strengthen their relationship to the community.
- Complete necessary school construction projects.
- Systematically utilise the schools' possibilities of consolidation with students' interest in mind.
- Improve communications and facilitate positive school spirit. Specifically, deliberate ways to facilitate solidarity between students of diverse backgrounds.
- Strengthen communication and trust between the educational committee and schools.
- Strengthen music education by merging the music school and the elementary school, ensuring that music and singing become integrated in the school work.

## Vision of the Future

The municipality's goal is to operate schools in the area that fulfil the strictest quality demands, where everyone involved works collectively toward diverse, creative, ambitious and successful schooling. The wellbeing of staff and students is an absolute priority. Rich emphasis is placed on outstanding working conditions and facilities, politeness, mutual respect, equality and human rights, cooperation and democracy.

## Basic Elements of the New Policy

School staff will systematically work towards implementing the basic elements of the new educational policy.

Ways

- Reading, reading comprehension and literacy take precedence across entire schooling.
- School staff continuously seeks to facilitate democracy and inform students about the significance of democracy.
- Students are offered diverse opportunities to work with creative and comprehensive subject matter.
- Equality is ensured across the board. Respect is shown to students' backgrounds and the diversity of backgrounds is considered a resource for the school work. Equal rights education is systematically woven into school curricula.
- Multiculturalism is viewed as a social asset which is consistently utilised throughout the school work.
- Sustainability is a guiding light in all school work. The students' sense of respect and responsibility with regard to their environment is bolstered by means of active participation in environmental projects.
- Ways to increase students' wellbeing and health are constantly sought.

## Key Competencies

Key Competencies, as defined in the new national curriculum, takes precedence in schools in Vesturbyggð. Key competencies concern all subjects and age levels, to the extent that students' abilities and development allow. In addition to key competencies, an emphasis is placed on cultivating students' dexterity and diligence in their work and studies.

### Ways

- Reading, reading comprehension and literacy takes priority over other school matters.
- Students receive systematic training in expression and communication, debate and discussion.
- Students are offered numerous opportunities to apply creative and critical thinking. They are offered a chance to grapple with challenging assignments.
- Cooperative procedures are a red thread through the entire school work. Students learn to work with others and participate in diverse cooperative projects.
- Students learn to engage with varying media, e.g. film, slides, drama and websites.
- Students make plans, set aims and participate in evaluation and assessment of their performances.
- Emphasis is placed on cultivating diligence and good attendance.
- Emphasis is placed on utilizing information technology in the school work and the schools strive to attain a leading position in that regard.

## Pedagogy, Education and Teaching

Schooling in Vesturbyggð is based on the ideology of inclusive education. The schools strive to create the best possible learning and development conditions for all students, whether disabled or not and regardless of their backgrounds. Diverse teaching methods and Individualised learning take precedence and social goals are no less at the forefront. The schools will systematically encourage students to actively participate and take responsibility over their learning. An emphasis is placed on wellbeing, exercise and activities that create stability and safety.

### Ways

- Art and creativity are inseparable aspects of everyday school work.
- The natural sciences and mathematics will be given increased weight in the studies.
- Music and singing will be emphasised further in the school work.
- Outdoor teaching and field trips will become regular parts of the school work.
- Emphasis is placed on formative assessment, which will be woven into the school work in purposeful ways.
- Regarding communication, the schools base their approach on the ideas of restitution theory as well as on social goals that are prioritised at given age level.
- Elective subjects in the upper levels will be considerably bolstered and interest topics will become a regular part of the school work.
- The role of meaningful subject matter will be increased. For example, varying practical projects, vocational training, projects that revolve around everyday life and life skill education.
- An effort will be made to boost information technology and work with diverse media.
- The schools will attain an outstanding position regarding distance learning.

## Students

Vesturbyggð schools emphasise students' wellbeing, fruitful communication, mutual respect and students' responsibility over their own studies relative to their personal development. It is imperative that students are able to express their views on the schooling and that their voices are heard.

### Ways

- Clear and coherent rules which students participate in determining.
- Systematic work toward bolstering self-respect and responsibility.
- The studies are structured in terms of diversity and student participation.
- Students receive numerous independent projects to work on and complete.
- Class and focus group meetings are regularly held with the students in which their views are sought and where findings are then used to improve the school work.
- Systematic work to undermine bullying.
- The schools have effective prevention programs.

## Staff

The schools' desired goal is to possess at each time a team of well-educated, interested and ambitious staff, who strive for professionalism in their work. The schools seek to provide the staff the best possible working conditions and offer them opportunities to influence the school work.

### Ways

- Increasing the number of professionally trained staff will be a priority in the coming years.
- The schools will make an effort to close the gender gap by, among other things, encourage males to apply for positions.
- Regular staff interviews will be conducted.
- Creating the best possible working condition and fostering wellbeing for the staff is a top priority.
- The schools must systematically work toward creating solidarity and a positive spirit among the staff.
- Study visits to other schools are regularly available for the staff.
- Staff will receive continuous support for professional development and lifelong education.

## Parents

Cooperation with parents and homes is the cornerstone of school work. The children's wellbeing is the joint goal of both the schools and the homes. Strengthening cooperation with parents on all levels of schooling must become a top priority for the coming years.

### Ways

- Aim toward active parent cooperation across all levels of schooling.
- Parents should be able to access readily available information concerning school work, e.g. through comprehensive websites, parent newsletters, parent interviews, computer communications, regular school visits and meetings.

- Brain storming sessions will be held regularly with parents in which their ideas of the schooling are sought.
- Parents are encouraged to visit the school as often as they can and acquaint themselves with school work and directly participate in it.
- The schools must systematically work toward creating an inclusive environment for parents of children with a foreign background.

## School Development

A powerful and continuous aspiration for development marks a good school. An emphasis is put on making developmental work a regular feature of everyday school work. In this context, the school work basis itself on the concept of the professional learning community.

### Ways

- The schools must create conditions for the staff which allows them to work on sophisticated school development projects.
- The school curricula are under continuous revision.
- The schools utilise theoretically recognised methods for internal evaluation and base their reform policies on them.
- Reform policies will be available at each time in which priority projects are defined.

## The School and Local Community

The main goal of schooling is to prepare students for an active engagement in society. Consequently, it is imperative that the school is actively connected to its environment – nature, economic life and culture. The schools should give special attention to strengthening students’ knowledge and understanding of the area’s history and environment, economic life, human endeavours and nature.

### Ways

- History, nature, geography, human life and culture in the area features prominently in the schools’ curricula. Example of emphasised subject matters: Life at sea, fishing, agriculture, fish farming and processing, tourism, trade history, Látrabjarg cliffs, cliff birdlife, cliff descent by rope, the Saga of Gísli Súrsson, Hrafna-Flóki, Jón from Vör, Kristján Davíðsson.
- Students work on numerous assignments outside of the school walls, by means of observations, surveys and interviews. An emphasis is placed on outside teaching, field trips, nature study and visits to places of work.
- Students contribute to society through innovative projects, special efforts tasks, service education and projects associated with environmental education and sustainability.
- Emphasis is put on seeking cooperation with, and contributions from businesses, social organisations and institutions.
- School work is made tangible and visible in society.
- Vocational education is made a priority.
- Ways are sought to involve senior citizens in cooperative projects with the schools.

## Facilities

In the coming years, an effort will be made to ensure that the school housing and environment lives up to the strictest requirements.

### Ways

- As soon as conditions allow, a new preschool will be raised in Patreskfjörður.
- School housing, play areas and facilities will be ceaselessly improved.
- The educational environment is comfortable and encouraging, and students and staff will contribute to shaping it.
- Computer equipment must live up to the highest standards at each given time.
- Safety requirements must be met and accessibility regularly checked.
- The treatment of facilities should everywhere be exemplary.

## Cooperation of Schools and School Levels

It is imperative that staff on both school levels work in close cooperation based on the premises of both levels. The schools must ensure continuity in the children's education with the goal in mind of making the transition between school levels easier.

### Ways

- Strengthen cooperation between preschool and elementary school.
- Consistency and continuity characterises the school curricula and almanacs of preschools and elementary schools.
- Upper level elementary school students are given opportunities to work with a variety of projects in the preschools.