

# The free Danish school tradition

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# A short history of the free Danish school tradition

Before Denmark adopted a democratic constitution in 1849, society worked along hierarchical and mostly patriarchal lines. People were considered as being naturally subordinated to their superiors. Everybody belonged to a family dominated by a master, while he, in turn, paid service to his superior, a lord of the manor, perhaps, a duke or a king – with God as the ultimate power. This way of thinking was broken down, however, with the revolutionary movements that swept Europe in the 19th century. Man discovered his independence, his freedom – and his alienation.

In terms of its political history, the 1848-50 war between Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein, supported by the German confederation, and the final cessation of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864 meant a reduction of 40% in the nation's area – and wealth. But Danes responded to these challenges by finding their own identity in the form of a constitution (in 1849), and by establishing a 'free' primary school system and developing completely new types of institution, *efterskoler* and folk high schools.

European national consciousness was really awoken in the wake of what we now call the Romantic movement. In Denmark, it was headed by the theologian, poet and linguist *N.F.S Grundtvig* (1783-1872). He and *Christen Kold* (1816-70) were both highly critical of the nation's schools, because what they taught children was, they felt, primarily 'dead knowledge' such as knowledge about the Bible rather than knowledge that had a bearing on the life people actually lived. Furthermore, if democracy was to work, people had to be enlightened about life, about the world they lived in and about what it meant to live together and to understand

and accept other ways of thinking. What was more, education was not to be confined to childhood years but was to be life-long.

This emphasis on understanding and acceptance resonated with a majority of the population. As a result Denmark introduced a unique dual system whereby state education and 'free' school education came to be regarded as equal partners, not competitors. To this day, free schools and state schools function as complementary and often mutually supportive systems.

It was not only the subject matter taught in school that Grundtvig and Kold objected to. It was also the methods used. For them, the starting point for teaching should be the child and not a set of dusty texts predetermined by an 'authority'. Both men saw story-telling as a key to arousing the child's imagination and understanding, and Grundtvig placed enormous importance on 'the living word', and on communication from the heart.

Both Grundtvig and Kold favoured story telling as a method to rise and encouraged children's fantasy.

Although Grundtvig and Kold were radical in their critique of school (and of the Church), many Danes had some sympathy with them. Because of this, when in 1855 the Danish parliament passed a law determining that all children should be given an education they did not stipulate that this had to be in a school. Initially, many parents kept their children at home and educated them as they saw fit – but the first 'free school' had opened in 1852 and with time more and more free schools were established. Whether children were educated at home or

at a free school, their educational progress has always had to be regularly monitored by officials.

Free school developed in various ways, as befitted their liberal-minded origins. In some parts of the country there was a tendency to focus on individual religious awakening to a form of pietism. Other schools nurtured their own freedom of determination, while maintaining the essential qualities that underlay their thinking. Schools should respect the individual child, and nurture her/his talents, interests and qualities. They should focus on learning for life and on enlightenment in the broadest sense. And they should help each child to learn to live in a sense of 'togetherness', understanding their own place in their community and respecting each other.

The twenty years from 1860-80 saw an expansion of the vision of the free school into two new types of institution – boarding schools called efterskoler, where young people aged 15-18 would spend one year, and residential højskoler (folk high schools), where adults over 18 could at any stage of their lives take courses, subsidized by the state, lasting anything from just a week to nine months. Kold and Grundtvig had disagreed as to the 'ideal' age for a young person to leave home and become student at an , Kold arguing that it was best before they were 18, while Grundtvig believed they should be over 18.

In 1949 a teaching academy was founded in Ollerup to develop teachers for the free schools, efterskoler and folk high schools. This was a recognition of the fact that the skills required to teach at such schools, to live up to the principles of enlightenment embodied in a free school and to be able to teach children, young people and adults within that tradition, were of a different order from those acquired at normal teachers training college.

## Common principles for free schools

Free schools are free not only in fostering a freedom of spirit but in having certain freedoms enshrined in law. These include the freedom:

- To appoint staff with no central or formal qualification
- To admit or exclude pupils/students as they see fit
- To deploy their financial resources as they see fit, determining school fees, but also receiving a state grant
- To arrange their own curricula, placing emphasis on subject disciplines as they choose
- To adopt their own teaching methods
- To carry out assessments without using tests and examinations

For those Free Schools that are based on the teachings of Grundtvig and Kold - and they form the great majority - free schools work to a set of common principles. The following statements reflect essential aspects of their educational practice:

- Teaching gives emphasis to the living word
- Through teaching we become familiar with the history that we share with others and are animated to discover the dreams and hopes we harbour for our lives
- School is a living interchange between students and teachers
- School is both enlightening and enlivening; learning is also learning to live and to love
- Learning is life-long
- All people deserve equal respect

# The Danish folkehøjskole



## What is a Danish folkehøjskole?

The 'folkehøjskole' or, literally translated, the Danish 'folk high school' is a unique Nordic tradition and a sort of popular university with non-formal adult education. The folk high schools provide teaching and fellowship in courses with the primary aim of advancing life enlightenment and democratic education and training. The courses typically last from 4 to 10 months. There are no academic requirements for admittance and no exams, but you can get a certificate as a proof of attendance.

There are about 70 folkehøjskoler in Denmark, most of them in rural areas or smaller towns. Some are quite old, others more recent. Some are large and can accommodate more than hundred students, while others have room for only 30 or so. The most important thing about a folkehøjskole, though, is its atmosphere. The task of the academies, as one teacher once said, is to create "a climate where culture is a reality".

With one single exception, all the folkehøjskoler are residential. They become micro-cosmic societies, with students and staff living, eating, and sharing the same daily routines together for the duration of the course.

Most schools run long courses of 4-8 months during the fall and spring semesters respectively, and shorter courses of 1-2 weeks during the summer. The fall and spring courses are chiefly intended for young people between 18 and 23, the shorter summer ones for students of all ages. Two schools are especially for young people between 16½ and 19, and three others cater exclusively for senior citizens.

Over the past few years the average annual attendance has stood around 40,000 students. About 30,000 of the students attend short term courses, while about 10,000 attend long term courses.

To understand what is so special about the folkehøjskoler we have to look further than just the subjects they teach. Folkehøjskoler are required by law to provide a general broadening education and are expressly forbidden to compete with traditional specialist educational establishments. They are not allowed to award marks or grades, or to provide specific vocational training. Their principal task is to educate their students for life – in other words to shed light on some of the basic questions surrounding life for people in Denmark today, both as individuals and as members of society.

# The Danish folkehøjskole

The folkehøjskole is an educational institution, a school, and this must influence the daily life. But the difference from this type of school and schools within the school system is that the folkehøjskole has the freedom to select the subjects, methods of teaching, and types of classes. This each school can do according to its own philosophy and convictions.

A folkehøjskole can offer unconventional or interdisciplinary subjects, correlation of theoretical and practical work, innovative methods of teaching, small study circles, lectures, workshops, student-managed classes, etc. But the difference is, first and foremost, reflected in the variance in content.

## Subjects and types of schools

The varied ranges of subjects at the Danish folkehøjskoler are much the same as would be found anywhere else in the Danish educational system: Literature, history, psychology, ecology, it, communication, education, music, drama, sport, outdoor pursuits, dance, art appreciation, photography, pottery, dressmaking, drawing, development studies, international politics and so on.

Quite a number, though, have chosen to focus on just one or more particular subject areas. Some place the main emphasis on physical education – sport and gymnastics. Some concentrate mainly on music and theatre. Others centre their attention on art or crafts. Others again focus on foreign aid work, or on ecology, nature conservation and environmental protection. One school has chosen to devote its courses to film-making and the cinema.

You will find the following main categories of schools:

### Christian or Spiritual Schools

These are Bible schools or schools with a spiritual approach to human life.

### General and Grundtvigian schools

Traditional folk high schools with many disciplines where you can either immerse yourself within a single area or choose between multiple topics.

### Gymnastics and Sports schools

These are folk high schools with special focus on physical education. About half of the course is dedicated to sports, while the other half will be more general education, where you can choose between various disciplines.

### Lifestyle schools

Lifestyle schools are folk high schools with a special focus on diet, exercise and personal development. But they also offer general education, where you can choose between various disciplines.

### Schools for Senior Citizens

Three Folk High Schools have a special status in the folk high school law: They target an older audience and are allowed to arrange short courses only throughout the whole year.

### Specialised schools

Some folk high schools have chosen to focus specifically on a single discipline. However, half of the teaching according to the school law, must be of a broad general nature, which means that you can not for example, play music or paint all day.

### Youth folk high schools (16 to 19 years)

There are two schools, which have an age-related special status in the folk high school law. You must be at least 16½ years, when you commence your the stay at the school - and you must not be over the age of 19 years.



## Life at a folkehøjskole

The long courses at a folkehøjskole are characterized by the fact that life at the school becomes daily life. Students and teachers live together for long periods of time, and one has time to discover that a quick first-time appraisal is not always correct, that people from other social classes, different age groups, and often other geographic areas, are in possession of resources and values which one's preconceived ideas had not imagined possible.

One of the main benefits of a stay at a folkehøjskole is the intercultural meeting of people with common interests. Young Danes and foreigners use their stay at a folkehøjskole as a stepping stone to further education. The international environment of the schools provides a solid network as well as friends for life.

Teachers and students participate in common meetings planning various activities by discussing the scope and content of these activities. There are many schools where morning assemblies are held to begin the day with a common starting point. There are community singing and sports activities, there is keeping up with current events and bike trips. There are friendships, romances and break ups, midnight discussions, and planning and carrying out of school parties with entertainment and music. In short, a folkehøjskole is a social activity place so diverse that it cannot be compared to other places.

## Practical information

### Fees

The weekly price includes tuition fee, accommodation and all meals. Therefore, your living expenses can be comparatively low.

While attending the folk high school, you will only need pocket money and money to cover e.g. transport.

The price of the courses longer than 12 weeks is around 1,450 DKK per week (195 Euros). Courses from 2 to 11 weeks cost around 1.700 DKK per week. The short courses cost around 4.500 DKK for one-week courses and around 6.500 for two-week courses. The prices cover the education, board and lodging.

### How to apply?

When you have found a course and/or a school you wish to attend, you must contact the school directly and apply for admission. After completing the school's admission process (including paying the school fee), you then begin the application process to get the correct documentation to stay in Denmark.

To find out more about the application process go to [www.danishfolkhighschools.com/apply](http://www.danishfolkhighschools.com/apply).

The application process is rather lengthy, so it's important to begin the application process as soon as possible, and no later than three months before the course commences.

# The Danish folkehøjskole

## The folkehøjskole and the state

### The state requires:

- School buildings must be approved for folkehøjskole use by the Ministry of Education and other public authorities.
- Schools must be residential. Only up to 15% must be day-students.
- Schools must offer at least 32 weeks of approved courses annually and the longer courses must have duration of 20 weeks of at least 4 weeks. At least one of the courses must have duration of 12 weeks or more.
- Schools' regulations and statutes must be approved by the Ministry of Culture.
- Students must be at least 17½ (16 at Youth folk high schools) years old at the beginning of the course.
- Schools must have had an average number of at least 24 oneyear students (1 oneyear student equals 1 student for 40 weeks) during the three previous fiscal years preceding.
- Education may not be so specialised in one particular direction that it cannot fairly be termed generally broadening.
- No examinations may be held.
- The schools are obligated to offer guidance and counselling.
- The courses must be open to all interested, but it's a requirement that at least 50% of the students in each course are Danish citizens.

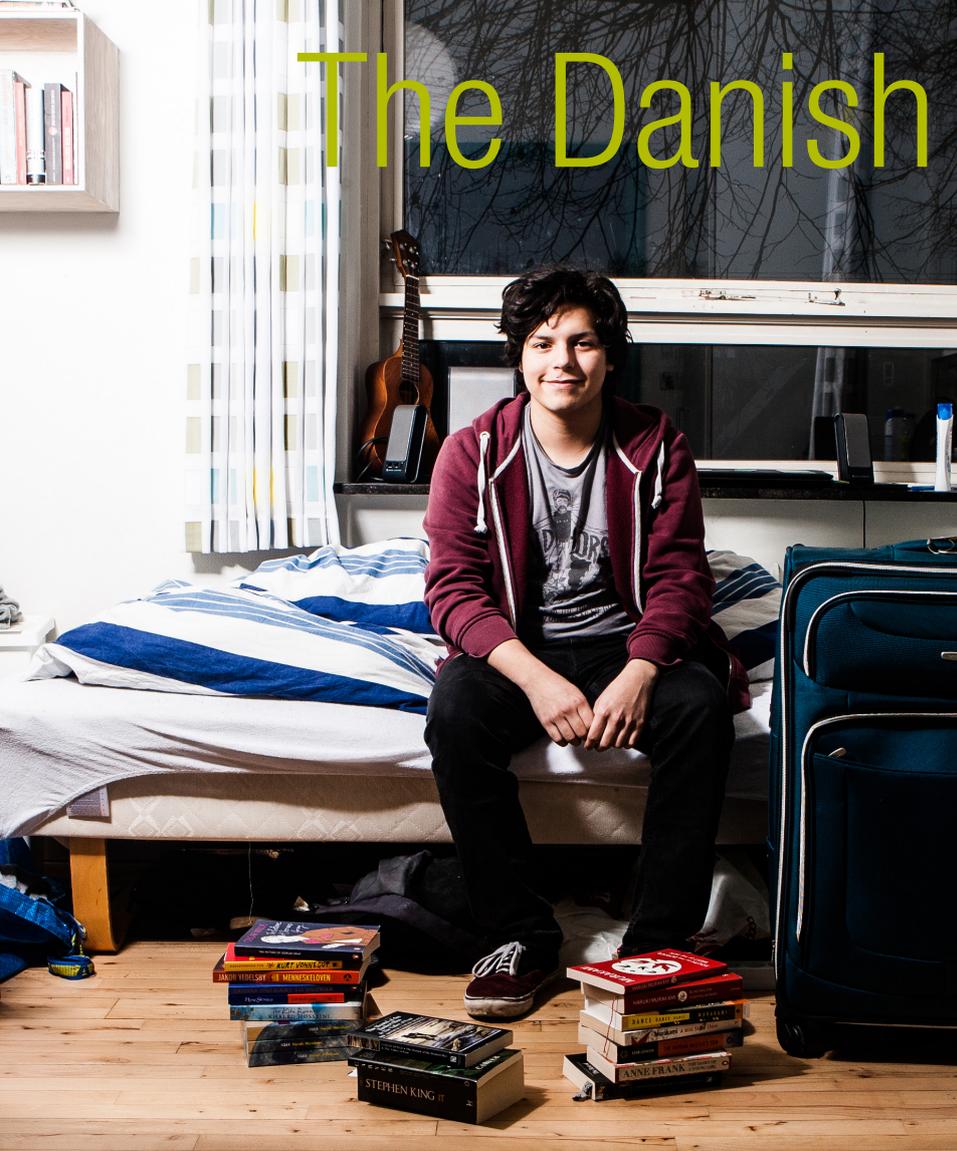
### The state provides:

- The state subsidy covers only about half of the average school's total budget (taxes, building maintenance, heating, wages of teaching and other staff, provision of meals etc.). The rest comes from student fees and the schools' own revenue from hiring out their facilities.
- The folkehøjskoler receive grants from the state for each student at the courses that last one week or more, so that the largest contributions are made for courses of 12 weeks. The government has also established special financial incentives in order to support young people without formal education and with special needs.
- The schools receive the same amount in subsidies for international students or people with immigrant or refugee status as they do for Danish citizens.
- International students are eligible for financial support for courses of no less than 8 weeks duration. Each school has a limited amount of money available to international students as scholarships to help cover tuition fees. It is up to each school to decide which students will be granted scholarships and what criteria they base their decisions on.

For more information go to  
[www.danishfolkhighschools.com](http://www.danishfolkhighschools.com)

**HØJSKOLERNE**

# The Danish efterskole



## The Danish efterskole

The efterskole is a form of boarding school unique to Denmark. Here, students from the ages of 14 to 18 can choose to spend a year or two of their lower secondary school education before continuing on to upper secondary education.

About 20% of all Danish teenagers attend an . The number of students has increased every year for the last 25 years. Currently there are about 245 of such schools attracting around 28,000 students from all levels of society.

The size of an efterskole can vary from 35 to 500 students but is on average 100-120 students. Most schools are located in rural areas or near provincial towns with only a few being located in a city.

## History

The first efterskole was founded in 1851 by Kristen Kold based on the educational ideas of the famous Danish poet, philosopher and priest N. F. S. Grundtvig (1789-1872), who founded the Danish folk high schools for adults and who wanted schools to provide enlightenment for life rather than formal vocational training.

Grundtvig wanted schools to arouse in the students an understanding of themselves and their place in life. Narrative and 'the living word' were given the favoured position previously allotted to books, and teachers would inspire students by talking about life, history, poetry and mythology.

While Grundtvig intended the folk high school to be for adults, Kold wanted to reach young people when they entered puberty. "Once the students turn 18, they start having girlfriends and smoking tobacco", Kold argued. Today the efterskole is still for students age 14-17.

# The Danish efterskole

## Funding

An efterskole is a private school that receives substantial state subsidy, about 66% of the school budget being covered from central government and 33% being paid by the parents.

The amount parents pay is regulated to reflect their parents' income, so that families with a high income pay more than families with a low income. There are also variations between schools in the resources they use per pupil and therefore in the fees charged. The average fees parents pay are between 5000 to 9000 Euro.

For students living outside Denmark the fees are about 10,000 Euro, because students without Danish citizenship will not receive support from the Danish government.

## Special subjects

An efterskole will typically choose to offer the same compulsory subjects and final examinations as state schools.

In addition to this, many schools focus on special subjects such as sport, music or outdoor life and other schools offer special education of various kinds.

As a result, many students at an efterskole share interests with their fellow students and as well as with the teachers, and common interests of this kind promote a powerful sense of togetherness and shared values at the efterskole.

The fact that there are many specialized subjects on offer also means that these schools have very teachers with very specialised skills and with an overriding passion for the subjects they teach.

Although most efterskole teachers have a teaching diploma, this is no requirement and the principal is free to hire teachers from all walks of life. This allows the schools to appoint teachers who have special qualifications in a particular focus area. For instance,

an efterskole that focuses on sports can appoint a former top athlete, or one that specialises in music can appoint a professional player to be a music teacher.

## Teacher-student relationships

One of the things that is unique about the efterskole is the relationship between teacher and -student.

Teachers at an efterskole are responsible both for teaching and for supervision outside school hours. This dual nature of the teacher's role means that teachers and students are together at all hours of the day from the time the students wake up until they go to bed. On those weekends when the students stay at the school, there are teachers on duty who play, talk and have fun with the students.

This often paves the way for close, personal and non-formal relationships between students and teachers. As the students and teachers get to know each other better, mutual respect and understanding grow, and this in turn has a positive effect on the classroom, where the students and teachers work together for a common goal.

The positive effects of the teachers' dual role is also reflected in the teacher acting as tutor outside the classroom, discussing schoolwork with a students while they are eating or playing a game together in the afternoon. In the same way students can ask for help with homework in the afternoon and evening.

## The results of the efterskole

Many students acknowledge that the positive learning environment and good relationship with their teachers at an efterskole give them a new appetite for learning. This positive motivation remains with the students when they continue on to upper secondary education, where both their teachers and researchers testify to the significant effects of the efterskole.

# The Danish efterskole

Research has shown that young people who have attended an efterskole come better prepared to upper secondary and higher education: They get higher grades than the students who have not attended efterskole, and they are less likely to drop out from upper secondary school.

The lower dropout rate is a result of the students being more mature and having deeper insight necessary to make the right choices in their secondary education. A number of politicians have pointed out that the efterskole's role in reducing the rate of secondary school dropout is a major contribution to society in general and something that has a high political priority.

In addition, the students who have attended an efterskole complete their higher education faster than students who have not, and this represents a reduction in the government's spending on education.

In the eyes of many Danes, a year at an efterskole is much more than a school year. A majority come to see it as the best year of their lives. It is a 'journey of self-discovery' that both in academic and personal terms prepares young people for adulthood. It is commonly said that, "one year at efterskole equates to seven years of human life."



# The Danish efterskole

## Democratic citizenship

A central element of any efterskole is the notion of democratic enlightenment that goes back to their earliest roots. They embrace a common educational focus on enlightenment for life, and democratic citizenship.

Solidarity, community and togetherness are key concepts within the efterskole, which is based on the idea of combining academic education with a deeper learning about the world, oneself and others as a way of preparing for all aspects of life, including understanding the place of the individual in a community.

The students in an efterskole all perform practical chores for themselves and for the common good, cleaning their own accommodation, making their beds, helping to prepare the meals, washing up and so on.

Students are grouped and are given tasks that contribute to the community of the efterskole. For example, one group might have to wake up an hour early to prepare breakfast for the other students. This gives them first-hand experience of making an important contribution for the rest of their friends at the school. Without breakfast, the day would have been ruined for their friends. The community has relied upon them to complete this task. And from this experience grows a sense of responsibility and an appreciation of the meaningfulness of contributing to the common good.

Many parents mention this as one of the more noticeable effects of the efterskole. Suddenly their teenage daughter or son is offering to help do the dishes after dinner, and they know how to make their bed. The parents are surprised and proud to see how considerate and helpful their teenager has now become, and how they appreciate their position and their responsibilities in the family community.

The efterskole has enabled the ugly duckling to grow into a beautiful swan. Once so insecure, their teenager is now a mature young person ready to take on the world.

For more information about the Danish *efterskole*: [www.efterskole.dk/english](http://www.efterskole.dk/english)



# Free Schools in Denmark



## Free Schools in Denmark

*The success of a grassroots movement*

### The tradition for compulsory education

Danish parents are free to choose whether they send their child to a state school or to one of the many types of free school or private school subsidized by the state. If they have the courage and perseverance, parents can even get together and set up a new free school of their own, based on their agreed principles, or they can teach their children at home (an option important in principle but rarely made use of). Such free schools can identify themselves with particular religious, political or educational ways of thinking. There is room to be progressive or traditional, or to cater for the elite; and there are schools for the minority populations and for immigrant groups. Diversity is very much in evidence.

Bringing up and educating children poses existential questions. Who has the right to determine the formation of a child – of any human being – as an individual and as a citizen? This has always been a philosophically controversial question. In Denmark we

have elected to have compulsory *education*, not compulsory *schooling* – and this emphasises the fact that it is the parents who are responsible for their child's education.

### The rights of the minority

Since 1849, when Denmark's democratic constitution was ratified, the rights of the minority have been enshrined in legislation. N.F.S. Grundtvig and his political allies fought for this principle, insisting that the minority should not only have the right to think and act as they wish in opposition to the majority, but that the majority (the state) should also provide them with economic support to live in accordance with their minority opinions. Here, in essence, is the approach to minorities adopted by Danish democracy. The protection of the minority is a right of the minority, and this was a statutory right that was particularly relevant to school legislation. The minority should not be subordinated to the majority but must be

# Free Schools in Denmark

able to uphold both their political and their economic rights – and even to make use of this right to oppose the majority. This view of democracy ensures considerable freedom to schools that are established by the minority.

## The fundamental principles of freedom

The freedoms relating to the independent schools can be assembled as five interdependent principles of freedom. Regardless of its ideological foundation, a free school approved by the state has the right to receive state subsidy and to be protected by these five principles of freedom.

- **The principle of ideological freedom**

It is parents who have the responsibility, and thereby also the right, to decide how their children are to be brought up and educated. Essential to this principle is the freedom to foster diverse viewpoints through education and upbringing, and this in turn implies the freedom to oppose other viewpoints – as long as this takes place in ways that do not contravene the law of the land.

- **The principle of pedagogical freedom**

The state has only relatively general requirements as regards educational content and none as regards methodology. In practice, schools are given considerable freedom with respect to the choice of educational content and the organization of school life.

- **The principle of financial freedom**

Although state funding is quite high in Denmark, parents have to contribute financially for their child to attend a free school, the amount varying from school to school. Schools have to have students in order to exist, of course, but they do not want financial considerations to be a decisive factor for parents considering sending their child to a free school. Therefore, schools try to keep the payment at a relatively low level.

- **The principle of freedom of employment**

Ideological freedom and pedagogical freedom result in schools themselves determining who has the appropriate qualifications to teach their pupils. No one outside the school, whether it be the state, the unions, or other authorities unconnected to the school, can determine what type of educational background and training their teachers should have.

- **The principle of freedom to admit pupils**

Just as no authority outside the school can intervene in the employment of teachers, so there is no official authority that can require a particular child to be admitted to the school. It is assumed that those parents who enter their child for the school agree with and will conform to the school's ideology.

## Diversity as a trademark

Free schools offer parallel education to state schools all the way through from pre-school to 10th grade (from the age of 6 to 16), the two systems existing side by side to create an overall educational landscape that is richer and more colourful as a result of their differences and their common aims.

Free schools have formed into a variety of groupings based on their history, educational principles or cultural identity. By far the largest group among the private primary (and secondary) schools are those free schools founded on the thinking of N.F.S. Grundtvig and Christen Kold. Being rooted in the principles of freedom, these schools are, as would be expected, very different from each other in their curricula, their traditions and how they organize the daily education. Despite this, they have many common characteristics, which can be traced back to views of man, nature, society and education derived from Grundtvig and Kold. Essential and commonplace elements of these schools are their deeply-rooted trust in democratic principles, their respect for oral traditions, and their belief that personal enthusiasm is more important than rote-learning.

# Free Schools in Denmark

## The structure of a free school

All free schools are non-profit institutions, meaning that a private person may not own a school, and the school must not be run for private profit. If there is a surplus, it remains in the school's account. All schools must have a board of governors as the supreme arbiter of all the school's activities.

Many, if not all, free schools have as their highest authority a 'School Circle', consisting of the pupils' parents and others who wish to support the school. From this circle, a board of governors is elected. The board of governors is responsible to the Ministry of Education for the running of the school as a whole.

It is a characteristic of these free schools that parents are actively involved in the school, by participating, for example, in the maintenance and cleaning of the school. In general, staff, parents and heads work closely together for the common good and to ensure the best possible development for each individual child.

## Facts about free schools in Denmark

About 18% of all children at primary school level from pre-school to 10th grade attend free schools. The number of free school pupils has increased over the last 15 years. One of the main reasons for this is that state schools are changing. Over recent decades, smaller local schools – with pupil number under 200 – have been closed or amalgamated by local authorities in favour of larger schools.

When the local state school closes, parents often establish free schools instead. The reason for this is that many parents can appreciate how much a small local school has to offer.

Today free schools receive 73% of the funding given to state schools, which is about 6500 USD per pupil per year. The governors

of a free school must send annual accounts to the ministry, and they must pay their teachers on a nationally agreed scale. Apart from this, the free schools are free to administer their funds in almost any way they like – provided they use the money for the benefit of the school.

The actual grant per pupil varies from one school to another depending on three factors:

- the size of the school (number of pupils)
- the age of the pupils (pupils over the age of 13 receive a higher subsidy)
- the location of the school.

## Supervision and evaluation

There are three levels of supervision/evaluation in free schools in Denmark:

1. The primary supervision lies with the parents. They have to oversee the practical running of the school as a whole.
2. The board of governors – together with the parents – have to appoint one or more inspectors, who must be approved by the state. The inspectors have the responsibility of overseeing the pupils' standards in Danish, Mathematics and English. Furthermore, the inspectors should use a review of the school as a whole to ensure that the quality of the education provided is at least as good as at a state school. The board of governors and the parents can also decide to evaluate the school themselves instead of appointing one or more inspectors. In that case, the Ministry of Education has to approve the method used for self-evaluation.
3. The ministry of Education monitors whether the free school complies with the law. A school can be placed under closer scrutiny if the ministry considers this necessary. In the final resort, the school can lose its state funding and the right to be a free school.

# Free Schools in Denmark

## Free schools – a successful alternative

There are various ways of measuring the success of a school. One is to look at the wellbeing, happiness and overall development of pupils. Though these are not easily measurable, whether they go to a free school or a state school, Danish children can expect these aspects to be prioritised.

When it comes to grades, free schools are more successful than state schools. Pupils in free schools score almost one score point higher than pupils at state schools, although several studies have shown that there are no significant differences in socio-economic background between pupils attending free schools and those at state schools.

Pupils from free schools are also more successful when they enter high school level and go on to formal education at college and university.

Many elements contribute to success in education: professional skills, teacher commitment, cooperation between school and parents, pupil autonomy and responsibility, the nurturing of independence and responsibility, of interdependence and collaboration, mutual respect between teachers and pupils, and so on. The success of Danish free schools is in large part due to having their roots deep in a culture that nurtures and sustains such elements, and that values the shared freedoms and responsibilities that are at the heart of the Danish constitution.

DANSK  
**Friskoleforening** 



# The Independent Academy for Free School Teaching



The success of the Danish educational system is arguably down to the longstanding marriage between mainstream education and the "Free School" system. Free Schools may be seen both as an alternative to state schools and also as a complement - a vital reminder that education is not primarily for work but for life, and that learning is individual, life-long and concerned with the whole person.

While it is deeply rooted in traditions of democracy, community and individual development, Free School thinking is constantly at the cutting edge of educational development and provides a model for teaching and learning that is respected the world over. Much of the developmental work on didactics and teaching method takes place at the Independent Academy.

Situated on the southern coast of the island of Funen in Denmark, the Academy was founded in 1949 and has since been the centre for the nurture and development of Free School thinking and practice.

It is a unique institution devoted to training teachers capable of fulfilling the needs of all three categories of Free School. It says something for the strength of the tradition it embodies that to this day the college remains independent, 'free' to determine its own curricula, staffing, teaching programmes and methods, to appoint staff and allocate funds, and to evaluate the abilities of students without recourse to examinations. Despite receiving central government funding, the college is subject to no central government control in planning its activities. It is, however, subject to regular assessment and results are monitored.

This is where those wishing to become qualified as Free School teachers develop the skills and knowledge they will need to do so. The course is residential and lasts for five years. This may seem a long time by some standards, but students here learn much more than their subjects and the relevant educational theory. They are involved in democratic processes at every level, acquire

# The Independent Academy for Free School Teaching

a deep insight into social dynamics, develop a wide range of what some might see as extra-curricular skills, and are constantly challenged personally, socially and didactically. They also complete three periods of teaching practice, one of which occupies their entire third year of study.

This is also where practising teachers come to find new energy, inspiration and ideas.

And this is where knowledge and research about the Free School movement are stored and developed.

According to its statute, the aims of the academy are:

1. To prepare teachers for the three forms of free school
2. To promote public awareness, active citizenship and global understanding
3. To provide inspiration for participation and leadership in the work of associations and networks
4. To provide and develop courses of further education and in-service training

## Syllabus

The course syllabus at the Independent Teachers College is devised in close cooperation between students, teachers and the principal. No external body – not even the Ministry of Higher Education & Science – has influence on the content of the courses taught at the school.

Individual courses are designed by teaching staff in collaboration with their students and approved by the principal.

The overall curriculum is divided into:

## Common subjects

*Thematic courses designed to develop students' professional identity, and courses in collaboration and communication, narrative and pedagogy, psychology and didactics. Common subjects are obligatory for all students.*

## Specialist subjects

*Danish, Maths, History/Sociology, Religion, English, German, Physics/Chemistry, Nature and Science Studies, Outdoor Life, Drama, Media, Music, PE, Art and Craft and Handicraft. Each student has to take four specialist subjects.*

## Options

*Music across the curriculum, Swimming, Sexual education, Active citizenship, Philosophical method, Basic IT, Aesthetic learning processes, Grammar, Written presentation and Pedagogical method for outdoor instruction. In addition, students are offered four courses in didactics aimed at particular groups: teaching children, teaching young people, teaching adults and teaching students with special needs. Students must choose at least one of these.*

## Special courses

These consist of:

*A three-week introductory course*

*Four study weeks*

*A four-week project period*

*A group dissertation under supervision*

*Two week-long assignments*

*A major assignment in a special subject*

All these are obligatory

As has been said, the Academy develops its own subject descriptions for individual subjects and courses.

In addition to such academic instruction, the course at the Academy requires students to take active part in the following:

# The Independent Academy for Free School Teaching

## Active democracy

Through obligatory participation in the school's parliament, year group meetings and committee work, students are trained in democratic involvement and decision-making. One day each week is devoted to such activity.

## Community activities

The school places considerable emphasis on social cohesion or 'togetherness' and the celebration of community, and these form an integral part of the school day. In addition, every year group plans, carries out and evaluates one large-scale social event at the school each year.

## Teaching practice

Students are on teaching practice for three weeks in their first year, three weeks in their second year and for a whole year in their third year, when they are employed on the same conditions as ordinary teachers

## Teaching certificate

In their final teaching certificate all four elements of the course are assessed. In addition, there are specific assessments from the board of studies as a whole, from individual subject teachers as well as an assessment from the school where students have carried out their teaching practice.

## Community activities

Being a teacher at a *Friskole*, *Efterskole* or *Højskole* involves much more than simply teaching a subject. It is almost a way of life in which teachers devote themselves entirely to life at the school. They organize meetings and parties and they take part in the cultural and leisure activities of the school. To live up to this form of teaching requires a wide range of talents.

To prepare our students for this area of their work as a teacher, the Academy sees it as being important for all students to take part in a variety of activities outside their teaching. We call these Community Activities. These might consist of major events organized by a whole year group, of concerts, of manning and maintaining the school's full-sized Viking ship, of conducting daily assemblies, of masterminding an international literary festival and much, much more.

Those who complete the course are subjected no examinations but receive a report detailing their engagement, competence and achievements in all areas of activity at the academy.

## Post-graduate courses

### Other courses for teacher development and training

The Independent Academy for Free School Teaching offers courses and conferences on further development in line with its view of humanity and education. Courses are designed primarily for teachers, head teachers, care workers and school governors at Free Schools, but educationalists from other areas have also benefited from these courses and are very welcome.

Courses and conferences take place at the Academy or at other institutions. They can be arranged to suit particular needs but typically take as their focus issues related to education, learning, school and human development in a contemporary context.

# The Independent Academy for Free School Teaching

## Course categories

1. Diploma in 'The Free Schools: tradition and pedagogy' (in conjunction with University College, Lillebælt)
2. In-house courses for schools
3. Conferences
4. Subject-specific courses
5. Ollerup courses (intensive one-week residential courses for practising teachers, head-teachers and care workers)

## The international dimension

Although centered around this small town on a small island in one of the world's smallest countries, the Academy plays a very active part in promoting innovation in schools all around the world and in encouraging democracy in and through education. Visiting educationalists from all over the world regularly come to see how this unusual system works – and go away inspired. Free schools have been established in many

countries and there are plans to set up international courses for students and teachers from abroad.

At the same time it is the Academy's policy to encourage its students to take some of their teaching practice abroad and so to encourage cross-fertilization between different school cultures.

## Funding

The Academy receives the same per capita grant as any other teachers' college. This subsidy covers the essential running costs of the Academy. For Danish and EU students, tuition on courses of further education is free. In addition, Danish students receive educational support for a total of six years to cover their living expenses.

Den frie  
**Lærerskole**   
Læreruddannelsen til de frie skoler



**Højskolerne**

  
**efterskolerne**

DANSK  
**Friskoleforening** 

Den frie  
**Lærerskole**   
Lærerruddannelsen til de frie skoler