

Private schools

Denmark has a tradition of private schools with a substantial government subsidy.

This tradition mainly originates in the ideas and initiatives of the clergyman, poet and politician, N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), and the teacher, Christen Kold (1816-1870).

On the basis of their ideas about "a school for life based on the living word", the first "folk high school" for adults was founded in 1844 and the first "free school" (private independent school) for children in 1852. They were in particular meant to serve the rural population.

The ideas of Grundtvig and Kold had such an impact on the political thinking of their time that they were written into the democratic Constitution adopted by Denmark in 1915. It stipulates general compulsory education not compulsory school attendance.

In Denmark, all children must receive 9 years' education, but provided a certain minimum standard is obtained it is a matter of choice for the parents whether the education is received

1. in the publicly provided municipal primary and lower secondary school
2. in a private school, or
3. at home.

Number of Schools and pupils

About 14% of all children at basic school level (including the voluntary preschool class and 10th form) attend private schools. In 2008, approx. 91,000 children attended 510



private schools, while 590,000 pupils attended the municipal school, of which there are approx. 1600.

Types of schools

Private schools in Denmark may be roughly divided into the following categories:

- small independent schools in rural districts (friskoler)
- large independent schools in urban districts (privatskoler)
- religious or congregational schools
- progressive free schools
- schools with a particular educational aim, such as the Rudolf Steiner schools

- German minority schools
- immigrant schools.

The bottom line is that private schools will be recognized and receive government financing regardless of the ideological, religious, political or ethnic motivation behind their establishment.

Some private schools are very old, some are quite new, and new ones are still being added. It is characteristic of the private schools that they are smaller than the municipal schools.

Legislation

All parties in the Danish Parliament want legislation ensuring financial support for private schools, partly based on the notion that the municipal schools also will benefit from the experience and competition offered by the private schools.

The legislation contains detailed rules about government financial support but only the most general rules about the educational content and whether the overall teaching is equal to what is generally achieved in the municipal school.

Educational content

All that is demanded of private education is that it measures up to that of the municipal schools. The small independent schools with a 9th class hold the Leaving Examination of the Primary and Lower Secondary School, unless they have informed the Ministry of Education that they will not hold the examination. However, in principle it is not up to any government authority but to the parents of each private school to check that its performance measures up to the demands of the municipal schools.

It is the parents themselves who must choose supervisors to check the pupil's level of achievement in Danish, arithmetic, mathematics and English and whether in general the overall teaching of the school measures up to what is normally demanded in the municipal school. If the pupil's knowledge is found inadequate, the supervisor must report it to the Ministry of Education. Individual parents who are dissatisfied with a private school may move their child to another private school or to a municipal school, or teach the child in the home. The local municipal school must always admit the child.

In extraordinary circumstances, the Ministry of Education may establish special supervision, for example if there is reason to believe that the school teaches Danish so

poorly that the children's ability to cope with life in Denmark may be impaired.

Public grants system

The private schools receive a grant ("per pupil per year") for their operational expenditures, which in principle matches the public expenditures in the municipal schools less the private school fees paid by the parents. This is to ensure that public expenditures for the private and municipal schools follow the same trend.

Operational grants

In 2006, the average grant towards the operational expenditures per pupil per year amounts to about DKK 41,000, and the average fees paid by the parents to DKK 9,000.

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 distribution of the pupils
- the location of the school.

A large school with comparatively young pupils will get a low grant per pupil per year, while the large grant per pupil goes to the small school with older pupils.

Special grants

There are also a number of special grants, such as grants towards expenditures incurred in connection with the teaching of pupils with learning disabilities or other special needs. These grants are awarded on the basis of a case-by-case assessment. Another special grant is the additional grant received by the German minority schools in the south of Jutland because they teach in two languages, German and Danish.

Some special grants are administered by the schools themselves. They include the additional grant received by the German minority because its schools teach in two

languages and grants towards expenditures relating to free places.

Building grants

The schools receive a block grant per pupil to cover rent, maintenance, construction etc. The schools receive a grant for their schoolbased leisure activities per pupil participating in these activities, from the school's preschool class to the 3rd class.

Block grant

All grants (apart from grants relating to special needs teaching and free places) are allocated as one total block grant independent of the actual expenditure. As long as this block grant is used for school and teaching purposes, the school is free to spend the money (and fix the school fees) according to its own priorities.

Grant conditions

To be eligible for public financial support, schools must be of a certain minimum size. A school must have a total of at least 28 pupils in the 1st to 7th classes, though only 12 in the school's first year and 20 in its second year.

Furthermore, the school must be a selfgoverning institution with a board of governors responsible to the Ministry of Education and with rules regulating the use of any net assets in case of liquidation. The school's funds must only be spent for the benefit of this school and its activities. A school must not be owned by a private individual or run for private profit.

Schools must be able to find a degree of selffinancing. The requirement per pupil in 2006 is about DKK 5,000 per year.

Joint municipal financing

Education at basic school level is in principle a municipal task, and the municipalities save expenditures on the pupils attending private schools. The municipalities are

therefore required to reimburse the government for a good deal of the government grant. In 2006, the municipal reimbursement rate is about DKK 31,000 per pupil.

Private upper secondary schools

The private upper secondary schools have the same public grant

system as the private basic schools. There are about 20 such schools, and they cater for 6% of all upper secondary school pupils. They differ from the private basic school, in that the content of their teaching is governed by the same rules as those applying to the public schools, the reason being that they both lead to

the same final examination, i.e. the upper secondary school leaving examination (the "Studentereksamen").

Number of pupils

| School year | Municipal schools | Private schools | Total | % in private schools |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------|----------------------|
| 1987/88 | 608.815 | 67.085 | 675.900 | 9,93 |
| 1997/98 | 529.202 | 71.451 | 600.653 | 11,90 |
| 1998/99 | 541.187 | 72.916 | 614.103 | 11,87 |
| 1999/2000 | 551.567 | 75.699 | 627.266 | 11,97 |
| 2000/01*) | 560.524 | 77.593 | 638.117 | 12,07 |
| 2001/02 | 573.377 | 80.111 | 653.488 | 12,26 |
| 2002/03 | 583.256 | 82.792 | 666.048 | 12,43 |
| 2003/04 | 591.884 | 86.050 | 677.934 | 12,69 |
| 2004/05 | 596.581 | 88.463 | 685.044 | 12,91 |
| 2005/06 | 596.303 | 90.832 | 687.135 | 13,21 |
| 2006/07 | 595.573 | 92.090 | 687.663 | 13,39 |
| 2007/08 | 586.435 | 91.232 | 677.667 | 13,46 |
| 2008/09 | 579.637 | 95.931 | 675.568 | 14,20 |

*) *Limited data quality*