

The Danish efterskole

The *efterskole* is a form of boarding school unique to Denmark. Here, students from the ages of 14 to 17 can choose to spend a year or two of their lower secondary school education before continuing on to upper secondary education.



Number of schools and students

About 20% of all Danish teenagers attend an *efterskole*. 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 and priest N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), who founded the Danish folk high schools. 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, 150 years later, the *efterskole* is still for students age 14-17.



Enlightenment for life

The educational idea of Grundtvig was 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 favored position previously allotted to books, and teachers would inspire students by talking about life, history, poetry and mythology.



Subjects and exams

An *efterskole* will typically 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, theatre or other subjects. As a result, many students share interests with their fellow students as well as with the teachers, and common interests of this kind promote a powerful sense of togetherness and shared values at the *efterskole*.



More information and contact

For further information in English, please visit
www.efterskole.dk/english



Contact

Efterskoleforeningen
(+45) 3312 8680
info@efterskoleforeningen.dk



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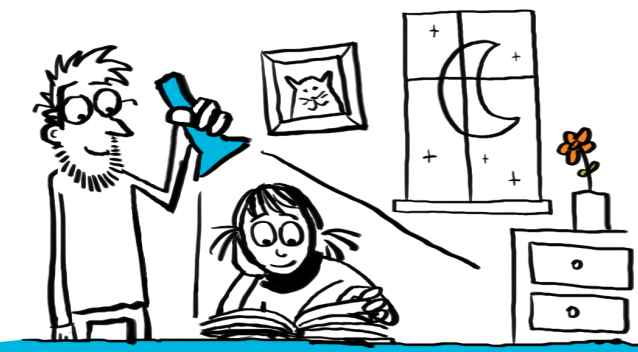
Democratic citizenship – and practical chores

A central element of any *efterskole* is the focus on democratic citizenship. One aspect of this is, that all students 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. From this experience grows a sense of responsibility and an appreciation of the meaningfulness of contributing to the common good.



Teacher-student relationship

One of the things that is unique about the *efterskole* is the teacher-student relationship. The teacher is responsible for both teaching and supervision outside of school hours. This means that teachers and students are together all day from the time the students wake up until they go to bed. This often opens up for a close, personal and non-formal relationship between students and teachers.



Results

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* with higher grades and a lower dropout rates compared to other students.



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."

