

My name is James Tester, and I am the director of Skagerak International Schools in Sandefjord and Tønsberg. Skagerak International School is a member of Abelia's Forum for friskoler - like almost all privately owned international schools in Norway.

I want to highlight the crucial role that the 26 international schools play in Norway, particularly focusing on Skagerak International School. Founded in 1991, Skagerak has grown to accommodate over 600 students and boasts more than 1,000 alumni. As Norway's only full-continuum (from kindergarten to high school) International Baccalaureate curriculum school, it offers a unique educational experience that is part of a global network of more than 10,000 schools. This attracts families from diverse backgrounds to Norway.

Although our school community is incredibly diverse, with students representing over 67 nationalities, we are also very Norwegian. Fifty percent of our student body are Norwegians looking for an alternative to the Norwegian public school system. All of our students speak Norwegian, and our school is committed to making students and families fully bilingual within three years. Many of our alumni have gone on to prestigious universities in Norway and worldwide—some of them are sitting in this very room.

The 26 private international schools offering the Primary Years Programme (PYP) and the Middle Years Programme (MYP) also play a crucial role in the Norwegian public school educational landscape. These schools provide a strong foundation for

students, preparing them for the high school IB Diploma Programme (DP), which is offered in more than 30 public high schools. By offering a globally recognised curriculum to younger students, these schools ensure that students receive a high-quality education that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and intercultural understanding. The collaboration between private and public schools in offering these programmes highlights the importance of providing diverse educational opportunities to meet the needs of all students.

However, our school and all the other 26 international schools like ours face significant financial and political challenges. We are at maximum capacity and still struggle financially with insufficient facilities, and politically sensitive underfunding. Despite being funded the same as a public school per student, all of our schools have to pay rent. In 2025 at Skagerak, we will pay over 13 million NOK in rent and costs, which is approximately 20% of our budget—money I would rather go to teaching, learning and student wellness. Despite being granted, or rather pleaded for, an additional 100 students for the Primary and Middle School by local corporations such as Jotun, we lack the space to accommodate them or the economy to pay more rent.

Despite these challenges, Skagerak International School makes a substantial contribution to Norway. Our school is a key factor in attracting and retaining talent in the country. For example, over 30 medical doctors and 20 university professors have moved to Norway because of our school in Vestfold alone. We have hundreds of students from companies such as Jotun and Kongsberg Maritime who are here solely because of our school.

Our internal data indicates that more than 150 families—all skilled professionals—have relocated to Norway for the school.

In conclusion, international schools like Skagerak are vital for Norway's growth and development. They not only provide high-quality education but also play a significant role in attracting and retaining global talent. As we continue to face challenges, it is essential to recognise and support the invaluable contributions of international schools to our society. We are an alternative to the public school, with a rigorous bilingual global curriculum accepted by UDIR, and a benefit to Norway. What we need to be successful is small and the benefits nationally far outweigh them.