

The History of Education in Kaustinen

The history of education in Kaustinen dates back to the 17th century, when education for the general population was largely the responsibility of the Church. Parish reading examinations, sexton schools, Sunday schools, travelling schools and confirmation classes were important forms of education. The ability to read and knowledge of Christian doctrine were required, among other things, of those wishing to take Communion or marry.

In Kaustinen, parish reading examinations were held in different parts of the parish until the 19th century. Reading was also taught in the villages by local schoolmasters. During the 19th century, Sunday schools and travelling schools broadened children's educational opportunities. A Sunday school was operating in Kaustinen as early as the 1850s, and regular travelling-school instruction began in the early 1880s. The travelling schools taught reading, writing, arithmetic, religion and Biblical history, among other subjects.

Travelling-school education continued until 1926, when the introduction of compulsory education transferred its functions to regular schools.

The Birth of the Elementary School

The establishment of an elementary school in Kaustinen was first discussed as early as the 1870s. Despite opposition, the first private elementary school began operating in 1879 at the Puumalainen farm. However, the school's activities were interrupted in 1881.

The elementary school reopened at the Seksmann farm in Virkkala on 8 January 1884. This year is regarded as the actual beginning of the elementary-school system in Kaustinen.

Local rectors and active community leaders played an important role in developing education. At first, schools operated in rented premises, and there was lively discussion in the municipality about how schooling should be organised. Eventually, in the 1890s, Kaustinen was divided into school districts, which became responsible for building and maintaining their own schools.

By the turn of the century, four main school districts had been established in Kaustinen: Kirkonkylä, Nikula, Vintturi and Köyhäjoki–Kola. Most of their school buildings were completed in 1895–1896. New school districts were subsequently established in areas such as Jylhä, Salonkylä, Järvelä and Puumala.

Compulsory Education and Municipal Schools

The Compulsory Education Act, which came into force in 1921, brought major changes to the school system in Kaustinen. Schools were gradually transferred under municipal administration, new lower-level schools were established, and the travelling-school system

was discontinued. The need for school premises increased rapidly, and several schools initially had to operate in rented facilities.

In the 1930s, new school buildings were constructed in Kaustinen, including the schools in Järvelä and Puumala. The number of school districts increased, and schooling reached an ever larger proportion of children.

During the war years, schoolwork was disrupted by temporary closures, shortages of materials and the arrival of evacuees, but the school system continued to operate whenever circumstances permitted.

The Development of Education after the Wars

After the wars, Kaustinen's school system expanded and school buildings were renovated and improved. Growing numbers of pupils in many areas led to the construction of new schools and the enlargement of existing ones. At the same time, school meals, school health care, dental care, pupil support and school transportation were developed.

In the 1950s, discussions began about establishing a middle school and a civic school. The Kaustinen–Ullava municipal middle school opened in 1960, and a new school building was completed in 1962. The civic school provided practical further education for pupils after elementary school. A joint Kaustinen–Ullava civic-school district was established in 1965.

The school network gradually changed as the number of pupils declined. For example, the schools in Nikula and Kola were closed in 1969, while schools in larger districts continued to operate and their facilities were developed.

The Transition to the Comprehensive School

In the 1970s, the Finnish school system underwent a fundamental reform. In Kaustinen, the transition to the comprehensive-school system began in 1974, and the entire municipality had moved to the new system by the beginning of the 1978–1979 school year.

The comprehensive school introduced a common, free, nine-year basic education for all children. In Kaustinen, the administration of education was reorganised, the role of the school board was strengthened, and the position of Director of Education was established in 1974.

The school system gradually became a unified whole, with schools in the different villages forming part of the municipality's common education system.

The Music Upper Secondary School and the Development of Upper Secondary Education

Music education became a distinctive feature of education in Kaustinen.

As a result of long-term efforts, permission to establish a music upper secondary school in Kaustinen was granted in 1976. The music upper secondary school began operating in the 1976–1977 school year, initially in the premises of the folk high school.

Over the decades, the music upper secondary school has become an important part of Kaustinen's educational provision. In addition to its music programme, the school offers a general upper secondary programme. Students have also had opportunities for cooperation with vocational institutions and higher-education institutions.

In 2026, the Kaustinen Music Upper Secondary School celebrates its 50th school year.

Education in Kaustinen Today

The education system of Kaustinen has developed from church-based popular education into a diverse, municipality-run system of education. Its history has been strongly shaped by village communities, teachers, the Church, municipal decision-makers and active local residents.

The history of education is also a story of the community spirit of Kaustinen. Despite opposition in the early years, education was developed purposefully in different parts of the municipality.

Over the decades, the school system has adapted to changes in society, the expansion of compulsory education, the comprehensive-school reform and new educational needs. The history of education in Kaustinen is therefore a story of the transition from an era of literacy and church-based instruction to a comprehensive school system shared by all, together with strong music and upper secondary education.

One of its enduring strengths has been the idea that education is a shared responsibility of the entire community.

Source: Risto Käsälä, Kaustisen koululaitos 1884–1984