



**EUROPEAN AGENCY**  
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



**RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT**  
OF ALL LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

# **RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

## **Country Report: Finland**



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# FINLAND COUNTRY REPORT

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‘Our similarities make us human, our differences make us individuals’ (C.A. Tomlinson).

## **1. What reference is made to raising achievement in national policies? How is raising achievement defined?**

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The educational systems of the Nordic countries are traditionally based on the idea of educational equity (Antikainen, 2006; Telhaug, Mediås & Aasen, 2006). One of their strongest principles is to provide equal opportunities and necessary support for learning for every learner, regardless of their socio-economic background, special needs or location. The idea of raising achievement for all learners has thereby been built into the system from the beginning. Despite changes made in legislation and in the contents of the curricula over the years, the Finnish education system in 2016 is still based on very similar values to those of the early years: ‘school for all.’

### **Ideology**

The Constitution of Finland stipulates that no one shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from others, on the grounds of gender, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or any other reason. Finland has also committed to international agreements, programmes and declarations, which require provision of education to guarantee learning for children and young people at a common school for all.

Education is free at all levels from pre-primary to higher education. In pre-primary and basic education, textbooks, daily meal and transport for learners living further away from school are free of charge. To ensure everyone has the opportunity to study, there is a well-developed system of study grants and loans. Financial aid can be awarded for full-time study in an upper-secondary school, vocational institution or higher education institution.

According to the Basic Education Act, education must be provided according to learners’ capabilities to promote their healthy growth and development. Those providing education must co-operate with learners’ parents or other guardians. Learners participating in education are entitled to a safe learning environment. The Act further states that learners are entitled to teaching that is based on the national and local curricula, as well as guidance and counselling every school day. Learners are also entitled to receive sufficient support for growth, learning and school attendance directly as the need arises and to free learner welfare necessary for participation in education.

The starting point for the provision of education, guidance and support is attendance at a good and safe school day. Schoolwork should be organised so that the conditions are as favourable as possible for the learner’s well-being, development and learning. The school community should be safe, friendly and respectful in terms of atmosphere. Teachers are required to treat learners as individuals and help them to proceed according to their own capabilities. Learners should also experience success and joy of learning. Basic education



encourages interaction, co-operation, joint responsibility and involvement. Special attention is paid to learners' opportunities to influence their own work and the learning environment.

### **Structure**

Finland still follows the model established in the Basic Education Act of 1968, when the early tracking system was ceased and comprehensive schools were grounded. The nine-year basic education begins at the age of seven and is mainly organised in local public schools. After compulsory education, learners continue to upper-secondary education on either an academic or a vocational track, which usually takes three years to complete.

A collaborative, supportive school forms an appreciative school community for its members: learners, teachers and other staff. The school co-operates with pre-primary education and other forms of early childhood education and care, morning and afternoon activities, other schools providing basic education, educational institutions offering further studies, health care and social services and other parties involved in supporting learners' growth and development.

In 2012, 96% of comprehensive schools were run by municipalities ([Official Statistics of Finland](#)). Their work was based on local municipal or school-level curricula, which were regulated by the National Core Curriculum (National Board of Education, 2004). In August 2016, schools began to implement curricula based on the renewed National Core Curriculum (National Board of Education, 2014). The new core curriculum also includes a description of the new three-tiered support model.

### **Reform**

The three-tiered support model was first introduced by the Ministry of Education in their Special Education Strategy (2007). The understanding of the overall support model is crucial, as raising achievement is not usually defined explicitly in Finnish national educational policies. Instead, the main aim of most policies is to raise achievement by securing that the system continues to promote equality. A central feature of the system is that individually tailored support is organised as soon as possible for anyone in need of it. Educational support and special needs education are organised by taking the specific local situation into account. Education for learners with special needs generally follows the curriculum of mainstream education, but it may comprise individually designed syllabi and timetables. The tuition should – as far as possible – correspond to that provided in mainstream education.

The implementation of the new support model was organised by the National Board of Education as an extensive three-year-long development project. It included:

- in-service training for school representatives in different areas of Finland;
- developmental evaluation of the educational municipality plans conducted by two universities;
- reflective dialogue between the participants at many levels (Ahtiainen et al., 2011; Thuneberg et al., 2014).



Therefore, when the basic education legislation was finally changed in 2011 to reflect the new model and to strengthen the inclusive local school principle, the municipalities and their schools had already structured their support practices according to the new legislation (see the description of the reform in Thuneberg et al., 2013).

Among other things, the new model's key content and support methods include;

- differentiation of teaching according to individual needs;
- part-time special education system;
- remedial instruction;
- student welfare services.

These had already been introduced with the implementation the basic education system in the 1970s. However, the structure and documentation of the provision of support was extensively reformed and early intervention, prevention and a pedagogical approach were emphasised, instead of psychological and medical restorative approaches. More recently, in 2013, legislation about student welfare services was also reformed. Both the new core curriculum and the reformed legislation stress the importance of a holistic perspective on the development of learning and learner well-being. They oblige the many professional groups working in schools and education to act together to reach these common goals.

One of the main reasons behind the reform was to counteract the growing number of special education referrals. According to Official Statistics of Finland, as many as 8% of learners received special education in 2006, of which half were taught in segregated classes or special schools (Lintuvuori, 2010). This shows that the Finnish system was not particularly inclusive and the reform can be considered as a response to the international call for more inclusive school policies. The adoption of the new model did not automatically lead to full inclusion, however. Since the decentralisation of school administration in the 1980s, the municipalities organised education relatively independently (Sahlberg, 2007). While there are still regional differences, the trend has now changed and the number of learners studying in segregated special education schools has diminished (Lintuvuori, forthcoming). However, the next challenge is to influence the way of thinking in a few parts of the country with a strong tradition of segregated special education schools.

### **Three-tiered support model**

Before the reform, support was provided either as general support or special education, which were both grounded on high quality basic education. General support was meant for anyone needing temporary help in learning, whereas special education required an official administrative decision based on a statement from either a school psychologists or a medical doctor (Jahnukainen, 2011; Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). During the reform, the division of general education and special education was replaced by a three-tiered support model. Its main principle – with some exceptions – is that moving to the next tier is only possible if the previous tier is proven to be insufficient.

The first tier, general support, should be provided immediately when any concern is raised. At this stage, no official documentation is required to organise support. The first-tier interventions can be conducted at a school- or class-level, or they can be individually



designed for specific learners. Support at this stage often consists of differentiation, remedial instruction and part-time special education, either as co-teaching or in a smaller group (National Board of Education, 2011; Thuneberg et al., 2013), but other means are also available.

At each stage of support, the effectiveness of the interventions is monitored continuously. During general support, effectiveness is typically monitored through systematic observation, screening and discussions between the learners, parents, teachers and school welfare professionals. If general support is concluded to be insufficient, a multi-professional pedagogical assessment is conducted. At this stage, the class teacher or special education teacher often has the main responsibility of gathering together the information obtained from other professionals. After pedagogical assessment, an individual learning plan is created and intensified support is organised. Intensified support consists largely of the same means as general support, but their intensity increases and multiple types of interventions are typically implemented simultaneously. The effectiveness of intensified support is again monitored systematically and interventions are adjusted according to individual needs.

When there is evidence that intensified support fails to provide sufficient support for the learner, a multi-professional pedagogical evaluation is conducted. At this stage, the special education teacher or special education co-ordinator often takes the lead. The traditional psychological or medical statements can complement the pedagogical evaluation, if needed. The work division is always decided locally and may also vary depending on the learner's situation. Based on the pedagogical evaluation, an official decision to start special support and an individual education plan can be made. Full-time special education always requires an official decision of special support. However, in the special support tier, all the other means of support are also available, but their intensity is further increased. Even at this stage, support is primarily organised in mainstream classes. Learners should not be placed in segregated part-time or full-time special education groups unless it is absolutely necessary. In some cases, the official decision of special support can be made without first providing general and intensified support. This is only possible in sudden serious incidents or, more commonly, if an individual learner's support needs are already considered as extremely high at a young age and it is very unlikely that lighter means of support would suffice. In this situation, a lot of information is often available from day care and pre-school that can be used when making the individual education plan.

### **Multi-professional student welfare work**

Student welfare refers to a multi-professional support system, which is different in each country. Finland defines student welfare by legislation. All Finnish learners should have access to a psychologist, a social worker, a school nurse and a medical doctor, in addition to the support organised by the school staff, which includes all teachers and student counsellors (see Vainikainen et al., 2015, for a detailed description of the work). However, comprehensive schools in Finland can have very different numbers of learners, depending on their location (urban vs. rural), and there is variation in how often the student welfare professionals are present in schools (cf. Saaristo & Kumpulainen, 2014). Also, despite a long history of student welfare work (Jauhiainen, 1993) and relatively firm national structures for it, schools are not similar in their working methods and ways of



collaboration (Laitinen & Hallantie, 2011; Pesonen & Heinonen, 2005; Salonen, Kallio, & Normia-Ahlsten, 2012).

In Finland, the term *student welfare work* is understood broadly as covering much of the non-teaching-related work done in schools, both by the permanent school personnel and the external representatives from different professional groups. *Student welfare group or team* refers to a team of different professionals, which meets regularly and is led by the school principal (see Ahtola, 2012; National Board of Education, 2011; Thuneberg et al., 2013). The team usually consists of special education teachers, school psychologists, social workers and school nurses, in addition to teachers of the learner or class in question. However, there are regional differences in the extent that these professionals participate in the everyday work of the school. Nonetheless, the team is always school-based and usually meets very regularly (Vainikainen et al., 2015). This is unlike many teams with similar functions in other countries (e.g. Anthun & Manger, 2006; Hjørne & Säljö, 2014; 2004; Iversen, Ellertsen, Jacobsen, Råheim, & Knivsberg, 2006; Thornberg, 2008; 2012, for results from the Nordic countries; Erchul & Martens, 2012; Lim & Adelman, 1997; Rubinson, 2002; Walker, Kerns, Lyon, Bruns, & Cosgrove, 2010, for a more international perspective). There is evidence that organising student welfare services through on-site teams can gain better results, both from a qualitative and a quantitative perspective (e.g. Iversen et al., 2006; Rubinson, 2002; Walker et al. 2010).

### The initiatives and actions for developing education of learners with support needs

Year	Process	Additional information
1972–1977	Gradual implementation of comprehensive school from the Northern regions towards Southern Finland	Municipalities became responsible for arranging and maintaining schools for disabled learners. Every child had the right to join compulsory education.
1986	State run special education schools and schools for pupils with hearing or visual impairment were transferred from social sector to educational sector	Learners with sensory impairment got equal rights to other learners.
1987	Publication of the new core curricula for different subsectors of special needs education	Special needs education got a new core curriculum.
1996	Publication of The State of Special Needs Education in Finland report	–
1997	The responsibility for organising education for	Severely intellectually disabled pupils were also admitted to comprehensive education.



Year	Process	Additional information
	severely intellectually disabled pupils was transferred to education sector	
<b>1998</b>	New Basic Education Act	Individual educational plan (IEP) was introduced
<b>1997–2001</b>	The development of the quality of special needs education project was implemented	–
<b>2001–2004</b>	LATU project for the development of teaching of pupils with special educational needs (60 municipalities)  Ideological change towards inclusion and local school principle.	–
<b>2001–2004</b>	Education provision in hospitals project (SAIREKE)	–
<b>2001–2004</b>	Supporting the basic education provision for Roma children project (ROKU)	–
<b>2001–2004</b>	Multiculturalism skills within school communities project (MOKU)	–
<b>2001–2004</b>	Language teaching project (KIELITIVOLI)  The development of local special education services project (ALPO)	–
<b>2007</b>	Special education strategy	The number of special education pupils had been growing for ten years. In 2006, nearly half of them were integrated either totally or partially into mainstream education and others were taught in special groups in mainstream or special schools.



Year	Process	Additional information
		<p>The growth in special education is attributable to factors relating to statistics compilation and rehabilitation, advances in diagnostics, new knowledge produced by research into special education and changes in educational legislation. Another explanation was the divergent administrative procedures in municipalities, which was seen in significant differences between local authorities in transferring pupils to special education.</p> <p>The Ministry of Education appointed a steering group to prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy for the development of pre-primary and basic special education.</p>
2008–2011	KELPO project for developing intensified and special support (almost every municipality in the country involved)	Implementation of the three-tiered support model in municipalities when preparing for the legislation change.
2010	The legislation and the National Core Curricula amended	To strengthen pupils' individual rights to educational support, the legislation and the National Core Curricula for pre-primary and basic education was amended. These changes were implemented in schools in 2011. The amendment specifies three levels of support: general, intensified and special support.
2011–2015	The <a href="#">Intensive Special Education Endorsement (VETURI) research project</a>	The Intensive Special Education Endorsement (VETURI) research project was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The project was grounded in research that recognises the importance of intensive specialised support services for students with severe special educational needs (SEN) that require co-operation of field professionals to ensure the quality of learning, teaching and rehabilitation. The focus was on learners with severe mental health problems, emotional disabilities, physical disabilities, developmental or intellectual disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).





Year	Process	Additional information
		<p>The project places equal emphasis on research for necessary in-service teacher education, professional co-operation, and career development.</p> <p>Research interests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus group current teaching arrangements</li> <li>• In-service teacher education.</li> </ul> <p>The research goal was to examine the current teaching arrangements of the SEN focus groups using action research principles. Therefore, a national survey about the current intensive special education endorsement arrangements was conducted in the spring of 2012. The following topics were covered in the research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effects of the Basic Education Act reform on SEN teaching</li> <li>• IEP processes</li> <li>• Current SEN teaching arrangements</li> <li>• Intensive endorsement arrangements</li> <li>• Co-operation of professionals</li> <li>• Integration and inclusion</li> <li>• In-service teacher education.</li> </ul>
2013	<a href="#">The Youth Guarantee</a>	<p>The Youth Guarantee came into force at the start of 2013. It offers everyone under the age of 25, as well as recent graduates under 30, a job, on-the-job training, a study place or rehabilitation within three months of becoming unemployed. The aim is to avoid a situation where young people are left without a study place or work for a long time, as this increases their risk of social exclusion.</p>
2014	Pupil and Student Welfare Act	–
2014	<a href="#">The national core curriculum for pre-primary and basic education</a>	<p>The national core curriculum for pre-primary and basic education was renewed in 2014. The process involved all stakeholders, particularly</p>



Year	Process	Additional information
		education providers and education personnel. The aim was to encourage parents and pupils to also participate in the process.  The renewed core curriculum was completed by the end of 2014.
2016	New curricula	New local curricula based on the core curriculum were gradually implemented in schools starting from August 2016.  Core ideas are active learners, sustainable way of living, integrative teaching, comprehensive education and school as a learning community.

## 2. What national policies specifically target raising achievement?

The general structure of reducing attainment gaps between different groups of learners is explained above in the description of the three-tiered model and no further explanations are needed here. As already stated, part-time special education, remedial education (also preventative) and student welfare services are available for all learners, regardless of the stage of support in the three-tiered model. Therefore, this section describes additional features of the legislation and norms that aim to raise achievement.

### Grade-independent studies

Grade-independent studies comprise flexible arrangements that enable individual progress in studies. These arrangements may be used to organise the work of the entire school, certain grades or individual learners. For example, they may be used as a means of supporting gifted pupils or to prevent drop out.

### Flexible basic education

Under the Basic Education Act, a local authority may provide activities within flexible basic education in conjunction with grades 7–9.

Flexible basic education is provided in an effort to reduce the incidence of dropping out of basic education and to prevent exclusion. Its goal is to strengthen the learners' motivation to study and life management. In addition to completing the basic education syllabus, learners are supported in their transition to the following stage of education and training, and their capabilities for studying successfully are developed.

Flexible basic education is intended for pupils in grades 7–9 who show signs of underachievement and a weak study motivation, and pupils who are assessed as at risk of exclusion from further studies and working life. Co-operation between professional groups and various branches of administration and organisations is highlighted in the instruction. Vocational institutions and general upper-secondary schools, liberal adult



education institutions and workshops for young people may also be parties to this co-operation. A steering group may be set up to plan and organise flexible basic education.

The school's operating and teaching methods are developed to meet the individual needs of pupils admitted to flexible basic education. Particular attention is paid to work forms that increase the pupils' participation and affinity with the school community and support the joint educational work of guardians and all those working with flexible basic education. Functional and work-orientated methods of study are emphasised in the instruction.

Flexible basic education is organised in small teaching groups in schools, workplaces and other learning environments relying on cross-sectoral co-operation and support and advisory services. In addition to the teacher, a professional with special competence in supporting young people's social growth, co-operation with families and other support and advisory work is appointed by the education provider to take part in the activities. If necessary, the instruction may also be partly provided in connection with another teaching group.

The instruction is provided as contact instruction in schools and as supervised study in workplaces and other learning environments. Studying outside the school is an essential part of flexible basic education. During these periods, pupils have a right to guidance and instruction provided by a teacher. Pupils are given learning assignments specified in the curriculum. Managing the learning assignments is taken into account in the pupil's assessment. The staff working with the pupils in the workplaces and other learning environments must be familiarised with statutes on occupational safety, data protection, secrecy and other requisite areas.

### **Extended compulsory education**

If the objectives set for basic education cannot be achieved in nine years due to the learner's disability or illness, compulsory education begins one year earlier than provided in the Basic Education Act. Compulsory education ends when the basic education syllabus has been completed or, for learners within the scope of extended compulsory education, eleven years after the beginning of compulsory education. The duration of pre-primary education for pupils within extended compulsory education may be one or two years. The purpose is to build the pupil's capabilities, allowing them to cope with their studies in basic education as well as possible.

Learners with severe disabilities are within the scope of extended compulsory education. Reasons for extended compulsory education may also include a serious illness.

### **Education for immigrant learners**

There are additional means for supporting pupils with an immigrant background. As the role of language is crucial in all learning, lot of emphasis is put on language teaching for pupils with an immigrant background.

Education for immigrant children of pre-primary age (6 years) is implemented in the form of preparatory instruction. The purpose of preparatory instruction is to facilitate the transition to basic education. Instruction focuses mainly on Finnish or Swedish as a second language. In addition, Finnish culture, various subjects of basic education and the learner's



mother tongue are taught. The state financial subsidies enable the education providers to arrange preparatory instruction.

The first year after arriving in Finland, immigrant pupils usually attend a small preparatory class in order to learn sufficient language for further studies. This can also be integrated into mainstream education, with support measures provided according to the learner's needs. Such support usually requires flexibility in the arrangements of instruction. At this stage, the pupils may need to go to a different school to their local school. However, they should enter the normal educational system as soon as they have sufficient preparedness for it; at the latest after one year of preparatory studies. The law allows special arrangements in religion and the second national language (Finnish or Swedish), as well as in pupil assessment.

The minimum amount of preparatory instruction provided for six- to ten-year-olds is 900 hours, while the amount for older pupils is 1,000 hours. Pupils can already be integrated into Finnish or Swedish speaking classes during preparatory instruction when possible, such as in sports, music or arts.

The Basic Education Act entitles all pupils to remedial instruction. Education providers can apply for government subsidies to provide remedial instruction for immigrant pupils. Subsidies are available for teaching the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, for learning difficulties arising from language-related problems and for teaching immigrant learners their own mother tongue. When pupils with an immigrant background study in mainstream classes, they receive additional instruction in both their own mother tongue and in Finnish/Swedish. Instruction in their own mother tongue is important for gaining the necessary concepts to develop higher thinking skills. This instruction is organised in addition to the usual lessons and, whenever possible, the teaching occurs in the learner's own school. For highly unusual languages, pupils are gathered in one school for these lessons, if the group size meets the minimum requirement set by the municipality. In Helsinki, the minimum group size varies between 4 and 6 learners.

Finnish/Swedish instruction for immigrant pupils is typically organised during usual Finnish/Swedish lessons. Most schools have a Finnish/Swedish language teacher with specific training in teaching immigrants.

The pupils' background and their improving command of Finnish or Swedish are taken into account in assessing other subjects. Versatile and flexible methods of assessment are used to reduce the impact of possible deficiencies in the Finnish or Swedish language. Assessment of immigrant pupils may be verbal throughout basic education, with the exception of the final assessment.

#### [Support Measures for Learners in Higher Education](#)

#### **Assessment for learning and assessment as learning**

Pupil assessment plays an important role in promoting pupils' learning. Assessment supports learning and is an essential part of the learning process. To support teachers in assessment, the core curriculum provides criteria for good performance for assessment at the end of grade six and the final assessment in grade nine. The foremost task of assessment is to guide and encourage the pupils. Pupils are not compared to each other. Instead, pupils are guided to reflect on their own learning related to the objectives.



Teachers help the pupils understand the objectives and recognise their own strengths and development needs. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to develop their skills for self-assessment and peer assessment so that they can both give and receive constructive feedback. Assessment supports the pupils as life-long learners.

### **Reducing attainment gaps between different groups of learners**

Support forms prescribed in the Basic Education Act include remedial teaching, part-time special needs education, interpretation and assistance services and special aids. These support forms may be used at all three levels of support, both separately and to complement each other.

### **Increasing attainment in certain areas**

#### *Web-based service for learning difficulties in reading and mathematics*

[LukiMat](#) is a public web-based information service for educators, other school personnel and parents. It provides information on children's reading and mathematical learning, and difficulties in mastering those skills. The service focuses on the development of the skills in children aged five to eight and is funded by Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The service is provided in collaboration with researchers in Niilo Mäki Institute and University of Jyväskylä. The web service has two parts; one for reading and one for mathematics. It is possible to use the service for free, but registration is needed to use the assessment or practice environments.

Users are provided with information on reading skills and mathematical development and learning difficulties occurring in the early school years. In addition, there are computer assisted instruction methods available for reading (Ekapeli) and for mathematics (Number Race, Ekapeli-Matikka and Neure). The service is available in Finnish and in Swedish.

### **Increasing the use of learner-focused measures (mentoring, nurturing approaches, personalised learning, assessment for learning, use of ICT)**

Under the Basic Education Act<sup>1</sup>, a school must have a pupil council composed of pupils. The task of the council is to promote joint action, involvement and participation of the pupils. It inspires pupils to put forward their opinions, be active and become involved in issues that concern them and their community. The student association and other structures and operating methods of the school and the municipality that support participation offer opportunities for practising democracy skills in real life (Core Curriculum 2014).

### **Government Programme**

The Government Programme is an action plan devised by the political parties represented in the Government. The current [Prime Minister Sipilä's Government Programme](#) was submitted to Parliament in the form of a Government statement on 29 May 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 47a (2) of the Basic Education Act (1267/2013)



The Programme has five strategic objectives, which include a total of 26 key projects. Six of the key projects are within the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Key projects for knowledge and education:

- New learning environments and digital materials to comprehensive schools
- Reform of vocational upper-secondary education
- Acceleration of transition to working life
- Access to art and culture will be facilitated
- Co-operation between higher education institutions and business life will be strengthened to bring innovations to the market
- Youth guarantee towards community guarantee.

### **Improving learner health and well-being**

#### *Pupil welfare and questionnaires*

In Finland, school attendance and well-being are supported by multi-professional student welfare work described in detail above (education and the social welfare and health administration). In addition to practices implemented at the school and municipal level, systematic information is collected about pupils' welfare. The main questionnaires are the [School Health Promotion \(SHP\)](#) and Wide Health Review for pupils in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. Parents/guardians are also invited. The Wide Health Review contains pupils' growth, development and well-being, as well as a statement about the welfare of families and parents.

The SHP study monitors the health and well-being of 14–20-year-old Finnish adolescents. The study aims to strengthen the planning and evaluation of health promotion activities at school, municipal and national levels.

The SHP study is carried out nationwide every second year. The study reaches 80% of the age group in comprehensive schools and 70% in upper-secondary schools. The response rate for vocational schools cannot be reliably estimated. The study gives an opportunity to monitor trends and assess differences between genders and areas. In school settings, the results can be used in the planning and evaluating of health education and co-operation between different professionals and learners. The results are also used in research and in different welfare programmes, strategies and policies.

### **Bullying**

[KiVa](#) is an innovative school-based anti-bullying programme which has been developed using research on bullying and its mechanisms. This evidence-based programme aims to prevent bullying and effectively tackle cases of bullying. The former is crucial, but the latter is also important. No prevention efforts will make bullying disappear once and for all, and so tools need to be available when a case of bullying comes to light. The third aspect of KiVa is constant monitoring of the situation in schools and the changes taking place over time. This is enabled by the online tools included in KiVa. These tools produce



annual feedback for each school about their implementation of the programme, as well as the outcomes obtained.

KiVa was developed at the University of Turku in Finland, with funding from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Its developers are experts who have been studying the phenomenon of bullying and its mechanisms for decades. The team is led by PhD Professor Christina Salmivalli and PhD Special Researcher Elisa Poskiparta.

### **Physical activity**

Children's and young people's physical activity has decreased, despite having a positive influence on motivation, learning and well-being. There are many projects to increase physical activity and decrease sedentary time among school-aged children.

[Finnish Schools on the Move](#) is a national action programme aiming to establish a physically active culture in Finnish comprehensive schools. Schools and municipalities participating in the programme implement their own individual plans to increase physical activity during the school day.

The programme is one of the key projects in the field of knowledge and education in the Finnish [Government Programme](#). The goal of the government is that 'the Schools on the Move project will be expanded across the country to ensure one hour of physical activity each day.'

The programme is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and is organised by the Board of Education, regional state administrative agencies and various other organisations. It is part of the Government Programme in Finland.

The Finnish Schools on the Move programme started with a pilot phase (2010–2012). In April 2016, more than 70% of municipalities and 1,500 comprehensive schools were involved in the programme.

'[Move! – monitoring system for physical functional capacity](#)' is a national physical functional capacity monitoring and feedback system for Finnish 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils. It produces information that can be combined with the extensive health check-ups performed for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils. The main purpose of the system is to encourage pupils to independently take care of their physical functional capacity.

In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Board of Education commissioned the Faculty of Sport at the University of Jyväskylä to develop a national monitoring system for physical functional capacity. The Move! system was developed in co-operation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the National Institute for Health and Welfare and the Trade Union of Education in Finland.

### **Providing additional support for schools achieving lower learner outcomes**

The allocation of resources to different schools is decided at a municipal level. In Helsinki, differences between schools are larger than in the rest of the country due to differences in the socio-economic structure of the residential areas (Bernelius, 2013). These differences are further strengthened by school choices that are not as strictly regulated in Helsinki as they are in most other Finnish municipalities (Bernelius, 2013; Vainikainen, 2014). To counteract differentiation of schools, Helsinki has a positive discrimination





system (PD) to provide additional resources to schools working under difficult circumstances. The calculation of the PD indices for identifying schools in need of extra resources is based on many variables. Besides learning outcomes, the factors influencing the PD index include the average income level of residents in the area and the number of immigrants in the area, among others. The additional resources, which are not very large sums but which schools can spend however they find most useful, can be used to hire a resource teacher (a teacher without their own class to teach) or to diminish class sizes, for instance.

### **Improve transition between phases of education**

Finland has recently improved transition practices between phases of education in many ways. The project for implementing the three-tiered support model in basic education (see above) in 2008–2011 had a strong emphasis on developing transition practices from pre-primary to basic education and from basic education to upper-secondary education. Transition practices refer to the flow of information between the phases of education, in a situation where legislation set relatively strict constraints on how much information could be transferred automatically. Therefore, the development of transition practices also included enhancing collaboration practices with parents, who must usually approve the transfer of information. At municipal and school levels, new ways of documenting observations were developed and structures were created for common meetings. Collaboration between the different phases of education was also facilitated by organising teaching and other activities across the borders of the educational levels.

There have also been changes in the national administration of education. Pre-primary education was recently transferred under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The National Board of Education prepares the core curriculum for basic education, upper-secondary education and for pre-primary education. In curriculum development, creating links between the different educational phases is emphasised.

The transition from basic education to vocational upper-secondary education is currently being extensively reformed. The reform includes further changes to legislation in order to secure every young person access to a study programme that is suitable for them. During the reform, transition practices have also been reformed by unifying pupil intake processes and entrance criteria across the vocational institutes around the country. Until recently, vocational institutes were free to choose their own methods for selecting their learners. In the new model, any entrance exams must adhere to a common framework. Additionally, learners with an immigrant background must take a newly-introduced language proficiency test to ensure that they will be able to follow the instruction of the institute they are applying to. If they fail the test, they can begin their studies in preparatory programmes, focusing first on language instruction. For learners with special educational needs or who have other reasons for having non-comparable school grades on their final report card, a new learning preparedness test has been developed by the University of Helsinki. So far, the test has been used twice for learner selection in vocational institutes that were willing to try it before the legislation change, but it will most likely be obligatory towards the end of the reform period. The test is a part of a so-called 'flexible application process', through which learners with special needs are given alternative ways to demonstrate their potential and consider how they would best overcome their difficulties. The aim of this approach is to find the best possible study





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programme for everyone, regardless of their needs. From the perspective of the vocational institutes, the process offers them information on how to best organise support for these learners when they enter the institutes.

### **Increase involvement of parents/local communities**

The purpose of the [Finnish Parents' League](#) is to combine parents' resources to build a good learning and growing environment for all learners. As a specialised organisation, the League strives to influence national opinion and decisions, for example, in the curriculum process. The League has started many projects to increase parents' participation in schools.

The University of Turku started the [Power Families project](#) in 2010–2014. The model was developed for early intervention for children with behaviour problems. Parents received counselling via the internet and by phone. All the methods were based on scientific evidence.

## **3. What information/data are collected at national level on attainment and achievement?**

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This is reported together with question 4.

## **4. What information/data on attainment and achievement (including the wider areas outlined above) are collected at school level?**

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Finland emphasises local monitoring of learning outcomes and progress (see question 5), but it also needs national and regional indicators for educational policy development at a national level. The Finnish way of assessing and monitoring the outcomes of education was described in detail in an article by Vainikainen, Thuneberg, Marjanen, Hautamäki, Kupiainen and Hotulainen (2017). This section of this country report briefly summarises the topics introduced in the article and the interested readers are referred to the original publication.

Unlike many countries, Finland does not have any national tests or exams for whole age cohorts to monitor performance trends. Instead, the national level indicators are drawn from sample-based assessments. The results are mainly used for checking the equity of learning opportunities in different geographical areas or school types and for pupils from different backgrounds. This includes pupils with special educational needs.

The sample-based assessment system was introduced in the 1990s, along with the Framework for Evaluating Educational Outcomes (National Board of Education, 1999). The framework divided the outcomes of education into three categories: efficiency, effectiveness and economy. The first category referred to the functioning of the educational system, the second to pupil-level outcomes and the third to the successful allocation of resources. The list of indicators for the first category, effectiveness, included both curricular assessments in key school subjects and national thematic assessments, as well as information obtained from large scale international assessments.



### **Sample-based subject-specific assessments**

The implementation of sample-based subject-specific assessments is specified in the four-year educational assessment plan, the latest of which was published for 2016–2019. These assessments are not repeated each year for each subject at pre-defined grade levels. Instead, there are typically two to three school subjects assessed each year with around 5,000 pupils participating in each test. The sampling procedure resembles that of the international PISA studies (OECD, 2013), with in-school samples instead of full cohorts and a sufficient geographical coverage. The assessments are implemented by the government agency, nowadays the [Finnish Education Evaluation Centre](#), which was established under the Ministry of Education in 2014 to co-ordinate national monitoring of learning outcomes.

The assessment tasks are developed by expert groups to cover the national goals of the Core Curriculum (National Board of Education, 2014). As most pupils with special educational needs follow the same curriculum as everyone else, with only minor adaptations, they also participate in these assessments. There are no separate test versions for pupils with the most intensive support needs who study according to individualised curricula, so they are often excluded from the assessments.

The sample-based assessment results are only used at a national level, but the municipalities can pay to extend the assessment to all of its schools. In this case, only the data from the original sampled schools is submitted for national monitoring; the rest of the results are only discussed locally. Therefore, evaluating individual schools from the perspective of how they have managed to raise the achievement of their pupils is not possible at the national level, even if the municipality has paid for the extension. Like international studies, national assessments therefore focus mainly on outcomes and possible inequalities in different regions of the country (e.g. Kupari et al., 2013).

### **Other types of assessment**

Curricular assessments have always been implemented by national agencies, but the national monitoring system also includes thematic assessments and international assessments that are usually implemented by universities. There are two types of regularly implemented non-curricular assessments in basic education: the national Learning to Learn assessments and the international assessments (PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS). Learning to Learn was defined as one of the measurable indicators of the effectiveness of education in the 1995 Framework (National Board of Education, 1999). It means general cognitive competences that are needed in all learning and motivational beliefs and attitudes that support the effective use of the competences (Hautamäki, Hautamäki, & Kupiainen, 2010; Hautamäki & Kupiainen, 2014). The model was created in 1996 and developed further during the following seven years, along with nationally representative large-scale assessment studies at the end of the sixth and the ninth grades and in both tracks of upper-secondary education (Hautamäki et al., 2013). Nowadays, Learning to Learn assessments are implemented mainly longitudinally on assignment from large municipalities (Vainikainen, 2014) and national assessments are conducted only occasionally (Hautamäki et al., 2013).

Municipalities use the results to evaluate the equity of grading between their schools and to provide tools for their schools to identify their strengths and weaknesses in their



developmental work. The results of national Learning to Learn assessments and international assessments have shown to be the most useful tools for monitoring the unfortunately declining performance trends in recent years (Hautamäki et al., 2013). However, the assessments – both curricular and thematic – have not been used to monitor how the achievement level of the weakest performers has varied across the years and whether the policies targeting raising achievement have been successful in this respect.

## **5. What information/data are used for school evaluation and quality assurance at national/local level?**

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Despite the moderate changes in the basic education system since the 1970s, school evaluation and quality assurance policies have been changed several times in recent history (Varjo, Simola & Rinne, 2016). Until 1985, the system was nationally controlled, for instance, by requesting teachers participate in extensive in-service training about the obligatory contents of the common curriculum. There were both national and provincial school inspections and all textbooks were pre-examined by the National Board of Education. However, even during that period there were no state-level examinations in any school subjects.

The system was liberated in 1985, when a new National Framework Curriculum was published. It allowed municipalities to have local applications in monitoring and assessment and only general recommendations were given on grading. Local autonomy was further increased in the 1994 Core Curriculum. By this time, Finland had completely omitted the school inspection system, alongside the inspection of textbooks (Aho, Pitkänen & Sahlberg, 2006) and they have not so far been reintroduced. Thus, whereas inspection systems usually hold schools accountable for achievement and make these judgements against criteria and standards (Gustafsson, Ehren, Conygham, McNamara, Altrichter & O'Hara, 2015), in Finland the municipalities had full responsibility for locally monitoring educational outcomes and quality after the legislation reform of 1998 (National Board of Education, 1999). At a national level, the monitoring is only done through the sample-based assessments described above and neither schools nor municipalities are accountable for the results. At a local level, the municipalities are free to choose their methods of quality assurance, but as yet there have not been any attempts to introduce any accountability systems, even at the local level. Instead, local monitoring is mainly based on observation and self-report questionnaires, with the aim of improving practices rather than punishing for not meeting some pre-defined standards. Some municipalities have included monitoring of learning outcomes in their local quality assurance system by buying extensions of national sample-based assessments or university-based additional assessments (e.g. Learning to Learn) for all their schools. However, even these results have only been used for school development and occasionally for allocating extra resources for low-performing schools (see the description of the positive discrimination system above).

All of this means that Finnish pupils and schools never face high-stakes testing situations that are related to accountability. National information steering in regard to learning outcomes is entirely based on low-stakes sample-based assessments. The matriculation



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examination taken at the end of the academic track of upper-secondary education is the only high-stakes external assessment in the Finnish system (Mehtäläinen & Välijärvi, 2013), but due to extensive possibilities for subject selection and the normative approach still applied in grading the exams, it only produces a very limited amount of information that can be used in monitoring the trends of learner performance or evaluating the quality of education systematically.

## **6. Are there any specific initiatives in place to support/enable teachers and/or school leaders to raise the attainment and achievement of all learners?**

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### **MONNI**

MONNI is a supported, web-based distance learning possibility for those learners who need a tailored school path to enable them to finish their compulsory education. These learners are unable to attend their own school due to psychological and/or physiological problems. Learners come from all over Finland.

In the project there are two nationally-operating agents working together: Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting, providing special needs services, and Otava Folk High School, which provides online comprehensive schooling. The learners' local schools are also part of the team.

Learners are in contact with their teachers via video conferencing (Adobe Connect), emails, phone, etc. The lessons are also transmitted to learners online. Learners complete the given tasks at home and are graded by the online teachers. For more information please contact: [johanna.sergejeff@valteri.fi](mailto:johanna.sergejeff@valteri.fi).

### **HundrED**

[HundrED Project](#) seeks 100 innovations from Finland and 100 from the world. In addition to this, they interviewed 100 education innovators about their vision for the future of education.

### **Majakka – Lighthouse (network of improving schools)**

[Majakka](#) consists of school networks which are intended to provide examples of how to develop Finnish education. Majakka aims to renew school culture and pedagogy, for example, raising the achievement, welfare and motivation of all learners.

### **Project for school leaders**

[KuntaKesu](#)



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## **7. What other policies may influence levels of attainment and achievement for all learners?**

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The Finnish education system and the multi-professional support structures are described in detail above. Other policies and actions are therefore already listed where these structures are introduced. The challenges are described in section 8.

## **8. Please provide a short commentary/critical reflection on the main policy challenges**

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The Finnish support system is quite extensive and well-structured. Where it is functioning as intended, it works in a preventative way without categorising or labelling children. However, since the decentralisation of school administration in 1980s, the municipalities have organised education relatively independently (Sahlberg, 2007) and there are still municipal and regional differences in how support is provided in practice. For instance, some parts of the country have a strong tradition of segregated special education schools and there is still a long way to full inclusion. The following section tries to identify some of the main challenges in the system at regional, school and individual level.

### **System level**

Even though major changes have been implemented at a national level by changing legislation and core curriculum, the actual development work has almost always been organised as projects. Usually, the state has issued funding for the municipalities to implement a project according to a plan prepared in the municipality. The idea has been that during the project, the municipalities develop their own structures for implementing the reform or beginning to work in a novel way. These structures should then be stabilised by the end of the project so that the work can continue, even when the extra funding ends. However, there are municipalities that do not apply for funding, partially due to a lack of experienced project co-ordinators. This increases differences between municipalities.

Another major system-level challenge is related to teacher education and in-service training. A basic understanding of support for all kinds of learners should be included in every teacher's training, but it is possible to proceed through teacher education taking only a minimum number of courses in this field. This is a problem, especially in subject teacher education. Even nowadays there are lower-secondary schools where subject teachers teach their own discipline very narrowly, without taking a holistic perspective on the individual differences of the pupils. This, of course, is also related to school culture (see below).

In general education, teachers are obliged to participate in in-service training for a minimum of three days per year. Teachers participate in this obligatory training with full salary benefits. However, in-service training activities have been poorly co-ordinated at the system level. The only larger scale attempt to solve this was the project-based OSAAVA programme that suffered from the same problems as all the project-based development projects. Thus, it is up to the regions or municipalities to define the



structures for in-service training. In some places, the time reserved for in-service training has been used for purposes that only have very small influences on school culture and practices.

The teaching profession is ageing in Finland and a large proportion of teachers are female. In pre-primary education, more than 90% of teachers are female. This may have an influence on school culture and gender equality in education. According to international and national assessment studies (e.g. OECD, 2013; Vainikainen, 2014), the gender gap in Finland is relatively large and boys have more problems with adjusting to the demands of school (Thuneberg, 2007). Also, the majority of pupils with identified support needs are boys (Thuneberg, 2007; Vainikainen, 2014).

Some stakeholders, like the Trade Union of Education, have a strong influence on how inclusion and the implementation of local school principles can be defined at the system level. They have, for instance, given controversial instructions on how joint planning time should be spent and who is qualified to organise special support for pupils.

### **Regional and municipal level**

The economic situation in Finland has recently changed, which has forced the decision makers to evaluate the value of education, too. At a national level, the current government has made enormous budget cuts to pre-primary, vocational and higher education. The economic crisis has also had an impact on basic education, but the cuts have mainly been made at a municipal level to balance the unstable financial situation of some municipalities. In practice, this has meant that in some municipalities, teachers and other school personnel were laid off for weeks.

Even at a local level, there may be big differences in school cultures regarding the provision of support. This partially reflects how municipal administration and educational policy makers understand inclusion and local school principles and how much autonomy they allow their schools.

Organising support for all learners cannot be limited to the field of education. Instead, collaboration between educators, health and social services and other fields of administration is very important. This can be challenging, as the administration structures of the municipalities are segregated and they lack common language and concepts. Information is not automatically transferred between different fields of administration and not all municipalities have sufficient practices to secure the smooth transfer of information that is needed to organise support.

### **School level**

Regarding learning outcomes, differences between Finnish schools have so far been small compared to the situation in many other countries. However, the decentralised administration structure of the education system allows for great autonomy for schools and the role of the school leader is thereby relatively strong. This calls for awareness of the effects of leadership on school culture, values and attitudes.

Information communication technology (ICT) has become an important part of society and should therefore be integrated to school practices. Currently, there are big differences



between municipalities and schools in how digital learning environments are used as a part of everyday school work.

Pupils should play an active role in regulating their learning process and in creating the school community. Some schools are doing excellent work in this respect, but there are also schools where the role of pupils remains relatively passive.

In Finland, teachers mainly work alone and their working hours are based on teaching duties. The time for planning joint activities is arranged at a school level, so there are big differences between schools in how this works in reality. The new Core Curriculum (National Board of Education, 2014) aims to solve this problem by requesting that teachers collaborate and organise instruction as co-teaching, but joint planning time remains a big school-level challenge, even after the reform.

### **Individual level**

Finnish teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are often reserved and critical, possibly due to a lack of self-confidence in managing diversity and a fear of extra work. However, some teachers see inclusion in a positive light, which seems to be related to teachers' practical experiences at inclusive schools (Mikola, 2011). Therefore, to change teacher attitudes, some of the practical training that is an obligatory part of teacher education should be organised in inclusive settings.

Finnish schools have traditionally been dominated by teacher-centred pedagogy. Even though there has been a switch towards problem-based pupil-centred practices, the attitudes of individual teachers may still prevent truly inclusive solutions.

Until the recent reform of the National Core Curriculum (National Board of Education, 2014), teaching and working habits in many classrooms were domain-specific, due to the strong influence of textbooks on teaching. Even though Finnish textbooks are generally of very high quality, they should not replace the curriculum as the basis of all school work. To enhance the development of transversal competences and thinking skills and to promote the inclusion of all kinds of learners, the new National Core Curriculum has introduced multidisciplinary learning modules that oblige teachers to collaborate, crossing the borders of traditional school subjects.

There are big differences in the ICT skills of teachers, creating inequalities in how ICT is used in teaching.





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## **ANNEX 1. EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE TO RAISE LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT (1)**

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Example submitted by: Elina Kuosmanen

Contact person: Elina Kuosmanen, school principal

### **1. Location of school/learning community and short description of context**

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Vierumäki school is located in Korso, in the eastern part of Vantaa. There are around 7,500 inhabitants in Korso. Pupils live in many different kinds of homes. About half of them live in town houses and half in rented flats. The neighbourhood is a fairly typical suburban type in Vantaa. The immigrant percentage is about 23%.

### **2. Summary information on school/learning community**

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Vierumäki primary school has grades 1–5. Pupils are aged between 6 and 12. There are two school buildings: the main school with 407 pupils (grades 1–5) and Kulomäki school with 109 pupils (grades 1–3).

All pupils in Finland are entitled to general support. If they need support which is bit more long-term, they are raised to intensified support. If that is not enough, pupils get a special education decision. There are 26 enhanced support pupils and 25 special education decision pupils in the school. We are arranging as versatile learning support as possible for them. Pupils who speak other languages as their mother tongue and Finnish as their second language often need additional support for their studies, too.

### **3. Summary of key feature/strengths of current practice**

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- We discuss solutions, not problems. We think that there is no problem in school that we cannot solve.
- We are planning learning support carefully for everyone who needs it.
- Pupils usually want to be part of a bigger group. Pupils with special needs might say, “I want to be normal, not special,” so every pupil has their own home class. Groups are one form of learning support.
- We have one special teacher and assistant for every grade, so when a pupil really needs the support of a special teacher or assistant, they will get it. When the pupil manages to be or learn in a bigger group, they can, so there are no special classes at all.
- Teachers, special teachers and assistants do very interesting and versatile work every day. The most difficult areas to teach and support are how to be, how to concentrate, how to behave.





- If there is some kind of crisis in the class and a pupil needs to calm down, they go to the special teacher's station (*pysäkki*) for an hour or the rest of the day.
- There is time to play every day in the first and second grades. Humour is important for adults too.

#### **4. Data/information available**

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It is important to build support for being and/or learning at the very beginning of the school path. If learning support is regularly needed, a learning plan is drawn up together with the pupil, parents and teachers. The school psychologist, social worker and school nurse can also work with the pupil and their family. If the pupil has contact with medical or mental health care, the school co-operates with them.

#### **5. Focus of example/work to raise achievement**

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All teachers and assistants have studied the Incredible Years programme. HyMy lessons for social and emotional skills also take place once a week. During this school year, we used Kaisa Vuorinen's '*Huomaa hyvä*' material. The learning environment is also arranged so that there is always a place for every pupil.

It is not always possible to change how pupils react. These are the times when teachers must/can change the way they act and work themselves.

#### **6. Summary information about developments/current work in this area**

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#### **7. Key learning points from this example**

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#### **8. Supporting materials (web links, papers, presentations, etc.)**

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[Values, vision, strategy and management system in Vierumäki School – presentation](#). This has been updated quite a lot because of the new curriculum, but updated versions are not translated into English.



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## **ANNEX 2. EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE TO RAISE LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT (2)**

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Example submitted by: Hanna Sarakorpi

Contact person: Hanna Sarakorpi, school principal

### **1. Location of school/learning community and short description of context**

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Comprehensive school in Espoo, including pre-school and grades 1–9, in a new and growing urban area near Helsinki.

### **2. Summary information on school/learning community**

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Comprehensive school in Espoo, including pre-school and grades 1–9. This school year only includes pre-school to grade 7, with 584 pupils, 50 teachers and 30 class assistants. The school will grow for the next two years, until it reaches 800 pupils.

### **3. Summary of key feature/strengths of current practice**

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- Personalised learning and personal learning plan for each learner
- Team teaching and planning together
- Involving learners in planning and carrying out activities
- Close co-operation with parents.

### **4. Data/information available**

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In Finland, we use self-evaluation and development plans. Tests are only used to plan the lessons to serve the needs of each learner, not to rank learners or teachers.

### **5. Focus of example/work to raise achievement**

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See the comments above.

We also use student activating methods a lot. Our goal is to involve the learners in their own learning process.

### **6. Summary information about developments/current work in this area**

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See the comments above and below.



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## **7. Key learning points from this example**

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We group learners in flexible learning groups in order to provide the right type of assignments for each learner. The goal is to help each learner reach their full potential. The key to grouping the learners is for the teacher to know each learner very well. We have developed a checkpoint system for teachers to collect data to serve this purpose.

## **8. Supporting materials (web links, papers, presentations, etc.)**

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[School website](#)

[Saunalahti school on HundrED website](#)



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## **ANNEX 3. EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE TO RAISE LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT (3)**

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Contact person: Ville Laivamaa

### **1. Location of school/learning community and short description of context**

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Lappee School is situated in the Ruoholampi area, eight kilometres from Lappeenranta city centre.

### **2. Summary information on school/learning community**

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There are around 330 pupils and 60 pre-schoolers in the school.

### **3. Summary of key feature/strengths of current practice**

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### **4. Data/information available**

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The University of Eastern Finland and the Niilo Mäki Institute have collected data concerning learner behaviour and well-being, related to their ProKoulu project. The results are not yet available.

Based on Lappeenranta's annual well-being survey, the pupils are doing well.

### **5. Focus of example/work to raise achievement**

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Lappee School and care centre focuses on well-being, social participation and allowing pupils to develop at their own pace. Solution-focused methods are applied to the promotion and maintenance of well-being. We have created clearly defined expectations for pupil behaviour, reinforced by positive feedback. Emotional and communication skills are taught on a regular basis at each grade.

Our pedagogical arrangements enable extensive support on the wide scale. When necessary, we offer flexible teaching groups, remedial education, part-time special needs education, neuropsychiatric coaching (known as 'Nepsy' coaching), as well as groups for learners with attention disorders ('Maltti' groups). A special needs teacher works in tandem with a classroom teacher at each grade level. The school can also arrange support from the school psychologist, school welfare officer or the school nurse.



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## **6. Summary information about developments/current work in this area**

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Most of the school staff have participated in solution-focused training. Due to the ProKoulu project, teachers have also received training regarding emotions and communication skills.

Learner participation is increased in many ways. Learners can affect their own learning and set their own goals. The long break in the middle of the day enables lots of activities that the learners want, for example, various clubs.

## **7. Key learning points from this example**

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## **8. Supporting materials (web links, papers, presentations, etc.)**

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- Short commentary/critical reflection on the main policy challenges
- Teachers', learners' and parents' prejudices against children with special needs and being different
- Insufficient resources or not child-centred resources
- Teachers lack time for arranging support (e.g. paperwork takes too much time)
- Not enough co-operation with homes
- School culture does not support learner participation
- The participation of learners with special needs lacks support in the community
- Teachers do not co-operate
- Lack of teachers' special needs training



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