

COUNTRY SYSTEM MAPPING

Country Report: Finland

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



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This country report has been drafted by Annet de Vroey for the Agency in co-operation with the Finland Team:

Representative Board member: Erja Vitikka

National Co-ordinator: Pirjo Koivula

Country Analyst: Tanja Aarela



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Secretariat

Østre Stationsvej 33

DK-5000 Odense C Denmark

Tel.: +45 64 41 00 20

secretariat@european-agency.org

Brussels Office

Rue Montoyer 21

BE-1000 Brussels Belgium

Tel.: +32 2 213 62 80

brussels.office@european-agency.org



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INTRODUCTION

The goal of the Country System Mapping (CSM) activity is to identify, map and analyse the key features that impact the effective implementation of inclusive education policy in practice in all Agency member countries' education systems. In a departure from previous thematic activities undertaken by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency), CSM considers the **whole** education system from the perspective of implementing policy for inclusive education in practice. However, within this system-wide view, there is a focus on the specific priorities Representative Board members (RBs) have already identified in relation to monitoring and evaluation, cross-sector working and quality assurance.

The main output from the CSM work is a systematic mapping of information on each country's education system.

Information from the individual CSM Country Reports has been analysed in two ways:

- **Thematic Analysis** to highlight issues (challenges and opportunities) emerging from the reports to use as the starting point for the Agency's Thematic Country Cluster Activities (TCCA).

Challenges for inclusion are defined as things the country needs to work on to reach an inclusive education system. Strengths for inclusion are things that encourage and reinforce inclusive practice in the country and could potentially be shown as an example to other countries.

- **Mapping** to inform TCCA groupings, based on the system structures and processes countries have (or do not have) in common.

The agreed goal for the mapping element of the CSM analysis work was to highlight parameters, or comparative factors, that indicate which country systems are structured and/or working in different – or similar – ways.

The information from the CSM work will be used within the remainder of the [Multi-Annual Work Programme 2021–2027](#) (MAWP). As of autumn 2024, country cluster activities will be organised which are closely aligned to individual country approaches to key issues for inclusive education, as well as system structures and processes countries have in common.



Work within a shared vision for inclusive education systems

All Agency work is aligned with the [position on inclusive education systems](#). This agreed position states that the ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that:

All learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers ([European Agency, 2022, p. 1](#))¹.

Agency work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems in member countries to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This aim is directed at all learners. However, all aspects of Agency work clearly recognise that some groups of learners face obstacles and barriers that mean they should be considered **learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education in mainstream schools in their local community, alongside their friends and peers**.

UNESCO identifies the possible obstacles and barriers to education learners may face as arising from:

... gender, remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes ([UNESCO, 2020, p. 4](#))².

Many learners may face a combination of these factors and the intersectional (inter-connected) nature of learners' needs must be acknowledged. Every learner has their own unique experiences of discrimination and/or barriers to learning. Everything and anything that can marginalise learners and increase their chances of exclusion from mainstream inclusive education must be understood and recognised.

All Agency member countries are committed to working towards ensuring more inclusive education systems. They do so in different ways, depending on their past and current contexts and histories. Inclusive education systems are a vital component within the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies that all countries align themselves with, both ethically and politically. However, all Agency work clearly recognises that countries have differences in their ways of thinking about, identifying and making provision for different groups of learners who may be considered vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

All countries have undergone key conceptual changes in their thinking and policy priorities for developments as they move towards inclusive education as an approach that ensures high-quality education for all learners. Across countries, the first shift was made from the concept of special educational needs to special needs education. This shift represented a focus away from the learner (identified as having special educational needs) towards a focus on the provision they receive (special needs education for learners who experience difficulties at school). The term 'special needs education' has also widened the focus

¹ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022. *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*. Odense, Denmark

² UNESCO, 2020. *Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion and education: all means all*. Paris: UNESCO



beyond learners with disabilities to include learners who appeared to be failing in school for a wide variety of reasons.

It is worth emphasising here that there have never been agreed definitions of the concepts of special educational needs or special needs education that can be consistently used across countries. The groups of learners considered as having special educational needs which require additional provision largely differ across countries.

The most recent shifts emphasise a move away from a concern with types of special needs or the categories a learner may or may not fall into, towards thinking of inclusion and inclusive education as an approach for all learners. They emphasise the barriers experienced by learners and focus overall on learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion from educational opportunities for different reasons.

Agency work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems in its member countries to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This aim is directed at all learners, while recognising the need to specifically address learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

Overview of the Country System Mapping

The information collected in the CSM activity aims to provide evidence of and reflection on **where countries currently are** in their inclusive thinking, policy and provision for all learners, but in particular for those learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education.

CSM work focuses on the **whole** education system and how certain structures, mechanisms and processes may impact on the implementation of policy for inclusive education in practice. It aims to get insights into how the needs of all learners – including individuals or groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education – are being considered. Many questions refer to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education. Countries have opportunities to clarify what 'learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education' means for them and their systems.

However, it is acknowledged that it may not be possible for countries to provide information covering all learners and all learner groups.

The questions specifically focus on four priorities RBs have identified for wider future Agency work in relation to:

- Monitoring and evaluation
- Cross-sector working
- Quality assurance
- Effective policy implementation.

There are six main sections:

Section 1. Background to the inclusive education system

Section 2. Overview of the education system

Section 3. Legislative and policy framework



Section 4. System governance

Section 5. Quality assurance and accountability

Section 6. Stakeholder collaboration, co-operation and effective communication

In each of these sections, relevant information was collected covering International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 02 (pre-primary education) to 3 (upper-secondary education).

Each section has two subsections which require different types of country information, as outlined below.

All questions were rephrased into statements for the purpose of this report.

System description

Sections 1 to 6 include specific questions that aim to provide a factual description of key aspects of the legislation and policy framework for inclusive education in the country. The system information aims to accurately describe the relevant policy frameworks in countries.

Different types of questions are used to collect information that describes important system features – structures, mechanisms and processes – relating to governance, monitoring, quality assurance and collaboration. The descriptive information includes sources of original material and, where possible, is supported with quotes and citations from relevant policy documents and published work.

The descriptive information will be analysed to highlight parameters, or comparative factors, that indicate how countries are structured and/or working. This mapping will be used to inform country cluster groupings based on system structures and processes that countries have in common.

The descriptive information will also be used to prepare thematic cluster activities with Agency member countries. These activities will elaborate and collect even more detailed country information for the different priority areas from 2023 onwards.

Evaluative commentary

An important element of the questions is the evaluative, qualified and evidenced-based reflection on the factual information provided in sections 1 to 6.

The evaluative commentaries aim to provide a qualified reflection on the implementation of the legislation and policy framework for inclusive education in practice. They provide observations on and interpretations of the system factors that impact positively or negatively on inclusive education.

The evaluative commentaries reflect on **where and why the practice of inclusive education differs from or actively supports the stated policy intentions and goals** in the system description.



For the evaluative commentaries linked to each section, the following general questions are posed:

- What have been the perceived main challenges (barriers and hindrances) for inclusive education? Why do they exist and what are the consequences?
- What have been the perceived opportunities (support and ways forward) for inclusive education? What areas for development are identified and how can they be successfully implemented?

In addition, specific topic-related questions are also suggested.

The analysis of the evaluative commentary information will take a grounded approach. It will aim to identify issues that emerge as barriers to or supporting factors for meeting the needs of all learners in inclusive systems.

This analysis will be used to inform future Agency activities with member countries regarding country-specific and common system challenges and opportunities.



SECTION 1. BACKGROUND TO THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM

This section provides key background information in relation to inclusive education in the country.

1.1 Overview of the historical development of inclusive education

We describe the development of inclusive education in Finland through three paradigms here. The first, **the institutional paradigm**, confined those in need of different kinds of support to separate institutions where their best interests were thought to be served (e.g. schools for the hearing impaired, the visually impaired and the physically disabled).

The 1960s and 1970s were times of drastic change as the country evolved from an agrarian society to a Scandinavian welfare state. To facilitate this transformation, the education system, which maintained the inequities of the class society for which it was designed, needed a total overhaul. Adopting a comprehensive school reform approach, Finnish educators and policymakers scrutinised everything from curriculum and textbooks to salaries and administration. At the same time, teacher training underwent substantial revision, with the goal of raising teacher education to the university level. Significant resources were also invested in adult education and higher education.

From an inclusive education perspective, this period can be described as **the rehabilitative integration paradigm**. The principle of normalisation meant that learners with special needs, such as those with disabilities, can learn as others do with some individual support. Integration in this context refers primarily to social integration. Under the new law (the Basic Education Act 1983), compulsory education was compulsory for all learners, regardless of their disabilities or illnesses. This made it possible to differentiate and, where necessary, individualise teaching according to the needs of different learners. The changes made in the 1980s also served as a starting point for a third paradigm, **the support paradigm**, in which students are supported, involved and included with their own individual characteristics. The school becomes more inclusive through various stages of development, and in Finland this development of a more inclusive school has been supported by a number of different systems, guidance and reforms.

The most important national development in recent years is the **development of the three-tier system of support**. The Basic Education Act (642/2010) presented a three-tiered learning and support system. The three-tiered support system comprises levels of general, intensified and special support. The first tier focuses on offering high-quality instruction for every student and meeting the diversity in general classroom. The second support level, so-called intensified support, is organised in terms of quality and quantity according to the student's level of development and individual needs. Special education support at the third-tier level is based on an administrative decision.

In recent years, since 2018, Finland has focused on **support for those learners most in need and most at risk of exclusion**. The latest nationally co-ordinated development relates to **intensified, multi-professional support** as a working method. The main focus is



on enabling the most challenging groups of learners to go to school by providing the support for local schools to do this. Examples of these groups include learners who are at the biggest risk of school drop-out, the provision of schooling for learners with the most severe intellectual disabilities, the provision of schooling for learners with somatic or mental illness, and the education of learners with a history of crime, violence or substance abuse (Aho, Pitkanen and Sahlberg, 2006; Jahnukainen and Itkonen, 2016; Paju, 2021).

1.2 Legislation and policy definitions linked to key concepts within inclusive education systems

Inclusive education

The school's operating methods, teaching arrangements and learning environments, as well as their suitability for the learner, are examined first. On the basis of this examination, it is assessed whether it is possible to implement more suitable pedagogical solutions by making changes in these aspects. In the examination and planning of the support, the results of any other assessments are utilised, and any support provided for the learner earlier is taken into account.

Primarily, support is provided for a learner in their own teaching group and school by means of various flexible arrangements, unless the learner's best interests necessitate their transfer to another teaching group or school in order to provide support (Ministry of Education and Culture – [Support for learning and school attendance](#); European Agency, 2022, Legal definitions around learners vulnerable to exclusion).

Special needs education

'Education must be provided according to learners' capabilities so as to promote their healthy growth and development'. 'Learners are also entitled to receive sufficient support for growth, learning and school attendance directly as the need arises' [Basic Education Act \(Eurydice\)](#); European Agency, 2022, Legal definitions around learners vulnerable to exclusion).

The legislation will be translated.

Extended compulsory education

A child is entitled to extended compulsory education if they will not be able to achieve the prescribed goals of education in nine years because of a severe disability or illness. A child entitled to extended compulsory education is also approved for special support. Both of these decisions are made the District Manager for early education and care.

The decision on extended compulsory education is usually made before compulsory education begins, meaning before the child is 6 years old. The child's guardians decide whether the child enters pre-school at age 5, meaning a year before compulsory education begins.



Pre-primary education may last 1–2 years, and it is organised in a day-care centre. The child will enter school when they start 1st grade. When necessary, the child may start school a year later.

Source: *Ministry of Education and Culture* – [Pre-primary education](#)

Students with severe disabilities, extended compulsory education to 11 years

The **activity area-based curriculum model** is used in Finnish comprehensive education to support learners – most of whom have profound intellectual and multiple disabilities – who could benefit more from skills that advance independent life coping.

See more: Peltomäki et al., 2021; Rämä, Kontu and Pirttimaa, 2020.

Learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

The [Basic Education Act](#) states:

Section 16, Intensified support:

A learner who needs regular or multiple forms of support for their learning or schooling must be provided with intensified support in accordance with their learning plan.

Section 17:

The decision on special needs support may be made before the start of pre-primary or basic education or during pre-primary or basic education without a prior pedagogical examination and enhanced support if it is evident based on a psychological or medical examination that the learner cannot be taught otherwise owing to a disability, illness, delayed development or emotional dysfunction or some other corresponding reason.

Section 29:

The education provider shall draw up a plan, in connection with curriculum design, for safeguarding learners against violence, bullying and harassment, execute the plan and supervise adherence to it and its implementation.

Source: *European Agency, 2022, Legal definitions around learners vulnerable to exclusion*

Section 30, Right to instruction:

An enrolled learner shall be entitled to teaching according to the curriculum, guidance counselling and sufficient support in learning and schoolgoing on school days directly as the need arises ([Basic Education Act](#): Amendment 642/2010).

Learners with special educational needs

Learners in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary school, as well as students in upper secondary school, have the right to learner welfare services (also known as student welfare). It consists of student welfare and student welfare services as specified in the



education provider's curriculum. These include the services of psychologists and school social workers as well as learner health care services ([Pupil and Student Welfare Act](#)).

The legal definition of special needs is found in laws and policies ([Basic Education Act](#); Pupil and Student Welfare Act).

The terms 'Intensified support' and 'Special needs decision' are defined in [Special education strategy 2007](#).

Intensive multi-professional support

(Known previously in Finland as 'intensive special education needs'):

Children and young people with severe mental health problems, multiple or severe disabilities, developmental disabilities or autism spectrum disorders need intensive and multi-disciplinary special support for their learning and rehabilitation. In addition, this group may include children who are home-schooled ([Finnish National Agency for Education](#)).

Source: *European Agency, 2022, Legal definitions around learners vulnerable to exclusion*

Other(s)

'Out of school learners'

There is not an exact official definition of OoS learners. The working definition of OoS learners (learners out of formal education settings) is basically the same as is used in the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal 4 indicators. Data is collected on learners (aged 7–18) enrolled in school and that number is compared to the population of that age. If the population of that age is greater than the number of learners in school, the remainder are considered to be OoS learners. In Finland, almost every child (ISCED 1 and 2) takes part in the formal education system. That is one reason why there is not currently a more detailed definition of OoS learners (European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education, [Out-of-school country survey results](#), p. 8).

The working definition includes almost all the key issues above (see pp. 20–22 'Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)'; 'Drop-out'; 'Early School leavers'). However, as mentioned, the definition is a rough calculation from learners enrolled in school compared to the population of the same age. At ISCED levels 1 and 2, almost every child takes part in the formal education system. At age 20–24 there is a NEET indicator, which covers those young adults who are NEET, and the EU's indicator of early leavers from education and training (aged 18–24) (European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education, [Out-of-school country survey results](#), p. 23).

1.3 Individuals or groups of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education focused on in the report

Over the past five years, the Finnish education system has structured the number of the most vulnerable learners and the critical areas of their education. At national level, co-operation has taken place between the Ministry of Education, the Finnish National



Agency for Education, universities and education providers. Development work has focused on the educational arrangements for **learners with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, school absence, out-of-home care children and learners with intellectual disabilities**. They have been identified as the groups most likely to be excluded from education.

For learners with the most intensive needs, support in learning and school attendance is often long-term, intensive and multi-professional. Learners who need this kind of support are in mainstream classes in primary schools, special groups, special schools like hospital schools, institutional schools or state residential schools. In recent years, research in special education has examined the barriers to inclusion of these learners and the procedures that could be used to make a more inclusive school possible.

See more: Anttila, Lindfors, Hirvonen, Määttä & Kiuru, 2022; Karhu, Närhi & Savolainen, 2017; Kääriälä, Gyllenberg, Sund, Pekkarinen, Keski-Säntti, Ristikari, Heino & Sourander, 2022; Peltomäki, Pirttimaa, Pyhältö & Kontu, 2021.

1.4 Development of thinking around learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

From the early 1970s, **the principle of normalisation** and **the philosophy of integration** were at the forefront in educating learners who needed special support. The principle of normalisation aimed **to make the lives of people with disabilities as normal as possible**. Integration was considered the means to implement this normalisation. The objective was social integration; in other words, the opportunity for learners with special needs **to participate in mainstream instruction** in the school they would attend if they did not have a disability.

Integration has been promoted in basic education since the 1970s. The Comprehensive Schools Act, passed in 1983, enabled a better starting point to develop the integration process. According to the Act, learners could no longer be exempt from completing compulsory education. The comprehensive school national core curriculum, issued in 1985, raised **the issues of differentiation** and, where necessary, **the provision of special education and the individualisation of education and the syllabus**. In terms of promoting integration, it was important that education and the syllabus were individualised to enable special education curricula to be used in conjunction with mainstream education.

Education for learners with minor intellectual disabilities began in primary schools in the form of special school instruction. In 1985, integrated instruction for learners with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities transferred from social administration to educational administration. From 1 August 1997, comprehensive schools became responsible for the instruction of learners with severe intellectual disabilities, which had previously fallen under social administration. Similarly, comprehensive schools took over the instruction provided by reform schools from 1 August 1998.

In 1995, there was **a national evaluation of the status of special education**. The conclusions of the evaluation formed the basis for national development measures implemented in subsequent years. The aim was to reform the operating culture,



organisation of education and joint steering by supporting regional and municipal integration of service systems.

The comprehensive reform of school legislation in 1998 and the resulting Basic Education Act (628/1998) aimed **to guarantee educational equality and equal educational services for all** those in compulsory education. The old legislation based on institution forms was replaced by more concise and centralised legislation based on the objectives and contents of education, levels and forms of education, and the rights and responsibilities of learners.

On 14 March 2006, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) appointed **a steering group to prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy for the development of special needs education in pre-primary and basic education**. The steering group proposed that the current practice be changed to focus on earlier support and prevention. General and intensified support were adopted as the primary forms of support before a decision on special support is made. The intensified support bolsters learning and growth and prevents the aggravation and escalation of problems related to learning, social interaction or development. The changes to the Basic Education Act came into force on 1 January 2011, but the provisions on learner welfare and data protection were applied from 1 August 2010.

The Finnish National Agency for Education revised the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary and Basic Education according to the new provisions, and they were also adopted on 1 January 2011. The amendment adds provisions on pre-primary and basic education and support given to learners. It aims to strengthen learners' rights to early, preventive support in learning and growth and special support, if needed. The support intensifies by stages: **general support, intensified support and special support**. Provisions on the processing and confidentiality of personal data and learner welfare services were also amended and supplemented.

A learner has the right to receive instruction and guidance in accordance with the curriculum and **sufficient support in learning and school attendance, as soon as the need arises** (amended Section 30). On every school day, every learner has the right to receive support and counselling. The support is a collaborative effort involving all teachers, the learner and their parents and, where needed, learner welfare personnel. Special needs education is provided, taking into consideration the learner's interests and the facilities for providing education, in conjunction with other instruction, or partly or totally in a special needs classroom or another appropriate facility.

Source: [European Agency, Country information](#)

1.5 Future education system developments that may impact positively or negatively on inclusive education

The Ministry of Education and Culture has the Development Programme for Quality and Equality in Comprehensive School Education

Comprehensive school guarantees everyone equal opportunities to learn the skills they need in life. The Right to Learn programme aims to identify effective measures to reverse the growth of inequality and to reduce group sizes. The objective is to reduce and prevent learning differences arising from children's socio-economic status, immigrant background



or gender, to strengthen support for learning and for special needs, and to improve literacy.

Right to Learn goals for comprehensive school education:

1. We will strengthen learning outcomes and equality in education.
2. We will make available better support for children.
3. We will strengthen the quality of teaching.

The National Forum for Comprehensive School Education and ECEC brings together experts and stakeholders in the promotion of educational equality. The Forum:

- supports programme implementation and dissemination of information;
- improves the effectiveness and continuity of development measures;
- combines expertise and evidence-based data.

The development programmes will both produce new data and make use of existing research findings.

Source: [Basics of early childhood education and care plans](#)

Evaluative commentary

This section provides a qualified, evidenced-based reflection on the **challenges, opportunities and consequences** of developments towards inclusive education. It specifically considers political decisions that have impacted (positively or negatively) upon the vision for and implementation of inclusive education in the country. It also considers how changes in thinking around learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education have impacted upon policy and practice.

According to the Constitution of Finland, everyone is equal before the law. No-one may, without a valid reason, be treated differently from other people on grounds of sex, age, origin, health, disability or any other reason that concerns their person. Children are to be treated equally and as individuals. They should have a say on issues that affect them to a degree corresponding to their level of development. Everyone also has the right to free basic education. Everyone is guaranteed an equal opportunity to receive education in accordance with their abilities and special needs, and to develop themselves without being prevented by economic hardship.

The Finnish basic education system has been based on the philosophy of inclusion for a long time. Basic education is the same for all. There is no streaming, but children are supported individually so that they can successfully complete their basic education.

The [National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary and Basic Education](#) was renewed and completed in 2014. The process involved all stakeholders, particularly education providers and personnel. The aim was to encourage parents and learners to also participate in the process. New local curricula based on this core curriculum were implemented in schools from August 2016.



Amendments to the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary and Basic Education focus on providing support as early as possible to prevent problems emerging and developing. Support for growth, learning and school attendance falls into three categories: general support, intensified support and special support. Everyone is entitled to general support. It is a natural part of the everyday teaching and learning process. Intensified and special supports are based on careful assessment and long-term planning in multi-professional teams, and on individual education plans (IEPs) for learners.

Source: [European Agency, Country information](#)

The OECD's policy considerations for Finland's Right to Learn Programme (2022) reveal a number of areas in which Finnish stakeholders will require guidance and support; not only do many actors require assistance to successfully implement or adapt to the RtL Programme's initiatives, but they will also need help ensuring that the reform is successful in achieving greater equity and inclusion. For instance, as classrooms in schools and ECEC settings become increasingly diverse, service providers, teachers and staff will need to know how and when to adapt their practices to the needs of children. As Ministry of Education and Culture moves forward with this reform, it will be key to identify the knowledge and skills that stakeholders on the ground will require, assess existing and prospective gaps, and address them through the provision of high-quality training programmes and support material.

OECD mentions the following as policy issues: 'Strengthening equity and quality in ECEC and Equalising education opportunities through strengthening the local school policy'. 'Promoting inclusive pedagogical practices and Embedding inclusive and diversity principles in Finland's evaluation practices' are mentioned as policy pointers.

Source: *OECD* – [Finland's Right to Learn Programme](#)



SECTION 2. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

This section provides information on the structures and features of the whole education system that influence the development and implementation of inclusive education in the country.

2.1 Overview of the education system

In Finland, compulsory education and the right to free basic education applies to everyone who is a permanent resident in Finland, not only to Finnish citizens. Basic and compulsory education is stipulated in the Basic Education Act. Education is compulsory from the age of 7 until the age of 18 (Compulsory Education Act 1214/2020).

A key feature of the national education culture is to ensure equal opportunities for all and to support each learner in order to guarantee their full potential. Differences between schools are small and the quality of teaching is high all around the country. Another key principle is that the education system is based on trust and responsibility. The provision of education is steered through regulations, information and funding. Local autonomy is strong. For example, one of the key regulations, the national core curriculum, leaves room for local variation so individual schools and teachers have freedom in designing their own curricula and instruction. In addition, there is little external control and the first national examination takes place at the end of general upper secondary education.

Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish. Regulations on the language of instruction are stipulated in legislation, and the Swedish-speaking Province of Åland has its own educational legislation. In addition, the Sámi language can be the language of instruction in basic education as well as in general and vocational upper secondary education and training, based on the Sámi Language Act (2003).

Stages of the education system are:

- (ISCED 0) Early childhood education and care (*varhaiskasvatus*). Participation is a universal right for all children aged 0–6 years. It is organised in day-care institutions and family day-care. There are moderate fees for families.
- Pre-primary education (*esiopetus*) – 5,712 schools ([Eurydice](#)). Compulsory pre-primary education starts one year before basic education at the age of 6. Municipalities have to provide pre-primary education of a minimum of 700 hours per year. Generally, this is organised so that the children have half a day of pre-primary education activities and the rest of the day is early childhood education and care. Pre-primary education is free.
- (ISCED 1–2) Basic education (*perusopetus*) – 4,398 regular schools and 112 special schools ([Vipunen Education Statistics Finland](#)). Compulsory schooling begins at the age of 7 and lasts until 18 years. It is provided in a single structure system called basic education. It includes grades 1–9. Education is free for learners as well as learning materials, daily school meal, health and welfare services, and transport from home to school if the way to school is long or dangerous.



- The law has been changed so that from 1 August 2021 onwards, compulsory education will be extended and upper secondary studies will become free of charge. The aim is that from then, every young person living in Finland will complete a secondary-level qualification. Compulsory education lasts until the learner turns 18. With the extension of compulsory education, all young people who have completed primary and lower secondary school (basic education) are obliged to apply for further studies. This means that all those who are finishing lower secondary school must apply for further education in the joint application procedure (*yhteishaku*) in the spring or in the rolling application procedure ([Ministry of Education and Culture](#)).
- (ISCED 3) Upper secondary education (*toisen asteen koulutus*) – 1,248 regular schools, including vocational schools, and 10 special vocational schools ([Vipunen Education Statistics Finland](#)). General upper secondary education (*lukiokoulutus*) and/or vocational upper secondary education (*ammattillinen koulutus*) is provided by general and vocational upper secondary institutions. The general age to participate in upper secondary studies is from 16 to 19 years, but in vocational upper secondary education many students are older.

[Eurydice – Finland overview](#)

[Eurydice – Statistics on educational institutions providing regular education](#)

[Finlex – Statistics on separate educational institutions providing special needs education](#)

2.2 Specific features that are present within the education system

Early tracking of learners into a particular educational pathway (i.e. streaming learners by abilities into different types of provision or school; this includes placing children into separate schools)

The Finnish basic education system has been based on the philosophy of inclusion for a long time. Basic education is the same for all. There is no streaming, but children are supported individually so that they can successfully complete their basic education ([European Agency, Country information: Finland](#)).

The education system does not have any dead-ends which would affect an individual's learning career ([Eurydice, Finland: Overview](#)).

'Double-shift' patterns to the school day (i.e. learners attend for either a morning or afternoon session)

Not present.

Grade retention (i.e. holding learners back to repeat school years, instead of providing flexible support that enables learners to progress with their peers)

A learner may be retained in a grade if they have not passed the various subjects referred to in paragraph 1 during the course of study or in a separate examination, or if it is considered appropriate in view of the learner's general educational performance. The National Board of Education may determine when failure in a subject does not result in



retention in a grade. The performance of a learner in the relevant grade who is retained in the grade shall expire ([Basic Education Decree 11 §](#)).

Multiple languages of instruction

Finland provides for the educational needs of both the Finnish and Swedish-speaking population, according to the same criteria. Both language groups have the right to education in their own mother tongue. Regulations on the language of instruction are stipulated in legislation.

Members of the Sámi population living in the northernmost parts of Finland have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. The Sámi language can be the language of instruction in basic education as well as in general and vocational upper secondary education and training, and it can also be taught as the mother tongue or as a foreign language. In the four municipalities located in the Sámi domicile area, learners speaking the Sámi language must primarily be provided with basic education in that language, should their parents so choose (Eurydice: Finland – [Population: demographic situation, languages and religions](#)).

The aims of migrant education, for both children and adults, include equity, functional bilingualism and multiculturalism. The objective of migrant education is to:

- prepare migrants for integration into the Finnish education system and society;
- support their cultural identity;
- provide them with an as well-functioning bilingualism as possible so that they will have a command of their own native language in addition to Finnish (or Swedish).

Specific policies on access to compulsory education in local schools (i.e. school selection policies)

Basic Education Act

Section 4: Statutory duty to arrange basic education and pre-primary education

1. The local authority shall have an obligation to arrange basic education for children of compulsory school age residing in its area and pre-primary education during the year preceding compulsory schooling.

Section 6: The determination of a learner's school

1. Education shall be arranged in municipalities so as to make learners' travel to and from school as safe and short as possible in view of the habitation, the location of schools and other places of education, and public transportation. In the arrangement of pre-primary education, account shall additionally be taken of the participating children's access to day-care services (Amendment 1288/1999).
2. The local authority shall assign to a child of compulsory school age and others receiving education under this Act a neighbourhood school or some other appropriate place where education is given under Section 4(1) and (2) in their native language in which the local authority is obliged to provide education. A learner participating in pre-primary education may also be assigned a day-care facility which fulfils comparable criteria or some other appropriate facility as a



place of education. For a well-founded reason relating to educational arrangements, the local authority may change the place of education without changing the language of instruction (Amendment 1288/1999).

3. A child may not, without the consent of the parent/carer, be assigned to education for which a fee is charged under Section 31(3), or to education which, in accordance with the local authority's decision or the authorisation to provide education, follows a given ethical or pedagogic system.

Section 28: Place of schooling

1. In basic education, the learner shall have the right to attend a school referred to in Section 6(2). 13.
2. A child of compulsory school age may also apply for a place in a school other than one referred to in subsection 1. In the admission of learners referred to in this subsection, the applicants shall be subject to equal selection criteria. If education is given according to a curriculum with special emphasis on one or several subjects, the admission of learners may also be based on a test showing aptitude for said education. The selection criteria and the aptitude test shall be made known in advance. However, the local authority may decide to give precedence to children residing in its area in admission to education provided by it.

Source: [Basic Education Act](#)

Other(s)

Home schooling

While education is compulsory in Finland, school attendance is not compulsory. Parents are allowed to arrange home instruction for their children that corresponds to the basic education syllabus. A few hundred families provide home education to their children.

Distance learning

At general upper secondary education level, over 100 schools offer distance learning which complies with the national core curriculum.

During the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020, the MoEC ordered the closure of all educational institutions (state and private), with a temporary transition to distance or e-learning. Temporary legislative amendments were introduced to the Basic Education Act (628/1998) to enable the safe organisation of teaching by giving local authorities the flexibility to use exceptional teaching arrangements and hybrid teaching (alternating between contact and distance learning) if contact education could not be organised safely (by decision of the education provider). However, these exceptional teaching arrangements did not apply to students in Grades 1–3, students who receive special educational support, or students in extended compulsory and preparatory education ([UNESCO, Education profiles, Finland: Non-state actors](#)).



2.3 Public and private authorities responsible for different types of provision

State provision of school education

Ninety-seven per cent of schools and enrolments at the level of basic education (9 years, 7–15-year-olds) is provided by the Finnish state. This is mostly through local governments, with a few schools administered by the central government and joint municipal authorities. Basic education is provided in a single structure, integrating primary and lower secondary education. At upper secondary level (3 years, 16–18-year-olds), the state similarly accounts for most of the education offer, covering 91% of schools and 90% of enrolments. **Education is free from pre-primary (1 year, age 6) to higher education level.** The state and the local education providers share the financial cost for tuition and the construction of schools. The local education providers receive central government transfers for costs related to establishing and using educational institutions.

Non-state provision of school and early child care provision

Finland has only 3% of non-state (private) schools, owned by non-state actors, at basic education level, covering 3% of enrolments. The share increases at upper secondary level, where private schools account for 9% of schools and 10% of total enrolments. Funding from the state is equivalent to funding in state schools and subject to the same standards.

Private schools are owned and managed by non-profit associations or foundations, with the majority of schools having a faith-based/religious orientation (religious schools). They follow the national curriculum and qualification requirements and are prohibited from operating on a profit-making basis. They do not charge tuition fees for student attendance, but may charge moderate fees in the case of education provided abroad, special education missions, and different language of instruction. The government encourages authorised pilots in the curriculum and pedagogical approaches, including the establishment of schools that are based on a particular philosophical or pedagogical system (such as Waldorf-Steiner schools and Christian schools). Such schools are granted authorisation by the government to deviate from the core curriculum on the basis of a 'special educational mission'. Other schools that follow non-traditional instruction include international schools that offer instruction leading to the International Baccalaureate (16 schools), European Baccalaureate (one school), and Deutsche Internationale Abitur (one school).

At early childhood care and education level, the government grants vouchers to families to widen access to this early education level. The voucher allows families to choose between a municipal or private early childhood education provider (voucher schools). In 2019, 13% of children were offered a service voucher, with the majority of services provided by municipalities.

Finally, a few schools exist that operate unlicensed by the government. If a private education provider is not licensed, the school may be established, but it remains outside of state supervision and is not entitled to any government funding. Moreover, any certificates issued by these schools are not considered sufficient proof of the completion of the education level in question ([UNESCO, Education profiles, Finland: Non-state actors](#)).



2.4 Levels of autonomy open to educational institutions – schools, local authorities, school maintainers, etc. – within the system

Eurydice 2.7 – Administration and governance at central and/or regional level: The education system is based on trust and responsibility. The provision of education is steered through regulations, information and funding.

At the state level

Education policy is defined by **parliament and government**. The programme of the current government, submitted to parliament on 10 December 2019, aims to build a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable Finland by 2030.

The Ministry of Education and Culture is the highest authority and is responsible for all publicly funded education in Finland. The Ministry is responsible for preparing educational legislation, all necessary decisions and its share of the state budget for the government. The remit of the Ministry of Education and Culture encompasses education and research. Universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) are directly subordinate to the Ministry. The Ministry is also responsible for administration of the cultural, ecclesiastical, youth and sports sectors. From the beginning of 2013, early childhood education and care fell within the remit of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

[The Finnish National Agency for Education \(EDUFI\)](#) is a national development agency. It is responsible for, among other tasks, developing education and training, early childhood education and care and lifelong learning, drafting the national core curricula for basic and general upper secondary education, basic education in the arts, vocational education and training, as well as for promoting internationalisation. It is managed by a governing board, represented by political decision-making, local authorities, teachers and social partners.

The Finnish National Agency for Education works in close co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Culture. It follows the development of educational objectives, content and methods according to the performance agreement with the Ministry of Education and Culture. The agreement is drawn up for a period of three years but is reviewed every year. It includes the tasks of the EDUFI as assigned by the Ministry. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) and the Matriculation Examination Board have operated as independent agencies within EDUFI since the beginning of 2018.

At the regional level

There are 15 [Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment \(ELY\)](#). ELY Centres strengthen regional co-operation in adult education, as well as networking between organisers of education, enterprises and other stakeholders. The agencies participate in forecasting developments in business and employment trends, and skill and educational needs. ELY Centres collect information on the state of the region's business life, the environment, employment and infrastructure. Based on this, they forecast future developments and aim to support regional decision-making by improving the underlying knowledge base.



At the local level

Local administration is mainly managed by the local authorities. Most commonly, these are municipalities or joint municipal authorities which have self-government and the right to impose taxes. The local authorities are responsible for organising early childhood education and care, pre-primary and basic education at a local level. They are mainly responsible for financing these as well. The task of the local authorities is to offer all children of compulsory school age – including those with mental or physical impairments – an opportunity to learn according to their abilities. The local authorities make decisions on allocation of funding and recruitment of personnel. They can also delegate the decision-making power to the schools.

At the school level

Local autonomy of schools is high. The education providers, both municipalities and the schools themselves, draw up their own local curricula within the framework of the national core curriculum. The national core curriculum leaves room for local variations and therefore individual schools and teachers have a lot of freedom in designing their own curricula and instruction.

They are also responsible for practical teaching arrangements, the effectiveness, and quality of their education. As long as the basic functions determined by law are carried out, the schools have the right to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements and visions.

There is very little external control, such as school or textbook inspections. In Finnish society, the teaching profession has always enjoyed great public respect and appreciation. Traditionally, teachers are trusted as professionals who know what is best for the children. Teachers have considerable independence in the classroom in terms of choosing appropriate pedagogical methods. Consequently, primary schools in particular are quite independent in designing their curriculum, teaching and learning arrangements, and use of public funds. This means that a teacher's work is considered to be an independent, high-status profession (World Bank – [Policy development and reform principles of basic and secondary education in Finland since 1968](#), p. 127).

The first national examination takes place at the end of general upper secondary education. The most important quality assurance mechanism is the self-evaluation carried out by the education providers themselves ([Eurydice, Finland: Overview; ibid., Organisation and governance](#)).

2.5 General mechanisms for funding schools

Education is publicly funded and free at all levels, from pre-primary to higher education. Every learner has the right to receive their education, interpretation and assistance services, teaching and learner welfare services (including the services of the school doctor and psychologist, dentist, therapists and social and health care), and any special aids required for participation in education, free of charge. In addition, textbooks, other learning materials, tools, work materials, school transport, daily school meals,



accommodation and full board, and the treatment of injuries sustained in accidents at school or during travel to school are free for all learners.

Every learner in Finland is assigned a place in a nearby school. Their parents can, however, choose another school, provided there is space in that school. The funding follows the learner if the school is in another municipality (Financing of Inclusive Education – Finland Country Report).

Education funding is shared among the state and local authorities, which cover the costs of tuition, school meals, and transport for students living further away from school. Students get free meals every day. Also, health and welfare services are free for students. In addition, transport costs are subsidised by the state. Government transfers are not earmarked. Funding of non-state schools is equivalent to funding in state schools and subject to the same standards. Private funding only accounts for 2.6 per cent of all expenditure in general, with only 1 per cent in pre-primary, basic and general upper secondary education, and a proportion of private funding of 4 per cent in upper secondary vocational education and training.

As part of the national steering system, the state pays subsidies to education providers to support the implementation of education policy and development. The aim is to produce models and practices that can be adapted by other providers as well as support permanent improvements. The subsidies are granted on the basis of applications from the education providers. Subsidies are available for a number of purposes, such as reducing class size in basic education, promoting learner welfare, use of ICT and international activities.

The financial autonomy of the school varies from municipality to municipality. Every municipality decides how much decision-making they delegate to the schools. In most cases, they allocate a budget for acquisitions, which the schools then use independently. Teachers and other staff are involved in deciding on acquisitions, particularly learning materials and text books.

Good learning outcomes are achieved at average expenditure. As the learning outcomes are good, it can be claimed that basic education is organised efficiently and effectively in Finland. The average costs per learner are close to the average rates in the EU, as well as OECD. Of all public spending in Finland, 11 per cent was used for education in 2015. Most of the total cost, 38 per cent, was spent on basic education. The biggest component is teaching, but – for example in basic education – the cost per learner also comprises school, meals, school transport, health and welfare services. Education is most expensive in sparsely populated area in eastern and northern Finland. In these areas, schools are often small or the learners are transported to bigger schools in the municipal centre.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services

In early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, responsibility for educational funding is divided between the state (25%), local tax revenues and client fees. Client fees cover about 15% of ECEC costs. Fees are based on the size and income of the family, and ECEC services are free of charge for low-income families. In 2017, one ECEC place cost EUR 12,300 for the year.



While the fees charged by municipal ECEC services are regulated by the Act on Early Childhood Education Fees 1503/2016, private ECEC providers may determine their own client fees (which are usually higher). However, families that choose to place their children in private ECEC are eligible for a private day-care allowance and additional income-adjusted support by the respective municipalities. In private ECEC services, providers can determine their own selection and admission processes.

Families that opt for private ECEC services are eligible for government support in the form of a service voucher under the Act on Service Vouchers in Social Welfare and Health Care Services (569/2009) or a private day-care allowance under the Child Home Care and Private Day-Care Allowance Act (1128/1996). Vouchers allow families to choose among municipal or private ECEC services that are registered in the municipality. Private day-care allowances are financial aid administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health which (similar to vouchers) aim to increase parents' choice in selecting ECEC services other than those provided by the municipality. In both cases, the level of financial aid received is income-based and only available towards private providers that have been registered with the municipality and fulfil the minimum requirements ([UNESCO, Education profiles, Finland: Non-state actors in education](#)).

ECEC teachers and child carers are employed by the municipalities or private ECEC providers. Their salaries are based on the collective salary agreement between trade unions and local government employers in Finland.

Pre-primary education, basic education and upper secondary education

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide education for children of compulsory school age living in their areas. Municipalities offer pre-primary education free of charge to every 6-year-old (European Agency, [IECE – Finland Country Survey Questionnaire, p. 2](#)).

Private institutions are under public supervision: they follow the national core curricula and qualification guidelines confirmed by the National Agency for Education. They receive the same level of public funding as publicly funded schools.

Local authorities and government co-finance basic education. The local authorities pay about 58% of the cost of basic education, general upper secondary education, vocational education and training and polytechnic education. In addition to providing about 42% of statutory funding, the government grants discretionary subsidies to education and its development and, in basic and general upper secondary education, funding for construction. Local authorities or joint municipal boards (consortia of municipalities) maintain most institutions providing basic and upper-secondary level education.

In pre-primary, primary, lower and upper secondary education, the textbooks, school lunch, health and welfare services and transport for students living further away are free for learners.

Teachers and principals are employed by the municipalities. Their salaries are based on the collective salary agreement between the teachers' union and representatives of the local employers (European Agency, 2016, Financing of Inclusive Education – Finland Country Report).



Upper secondary general education and vocational education and training

All students in upper secondary general education and vocational education and training are entitled to receive free instruction, free daily meals every school day and free accommodation in a hall of residence assigned by the educational institution ([European Agency, Country information: Financing of inclusive education systems](#); [Eurydice, Finland: Overview](#); [Eurydice, Organisation and governance](#); [Eurydice, Funding](#)).

2.6 Specific mechanisms for funding the inclusion of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

Financing is learner-based. There is no supplementary financing for special classes or special schools. Extra funding for education providers exists only for students participating in prolonged compulsory education (Section 25(2) of the Basic Education Act). This financing does not depend on the place of instruction, it is learner-based and the same for special schools and mainstream schools. For example, if due to a learner's disability or illness, the objectives set for basic education cannot evidently be achieved in nine years, compulsory education will begin one year earlier than provided and be 11 years in duration. The duration of pre-primary education provided for learners falling within prolonged/extended compulsory education may be one or two years. The purpose is to consolidate these learners' abilities to help them cope with their studies in basic education as well as possible. Extended compulsory education is intended for learners with severe disabilities, including those with visual and hearing impairments as well as those with other severe physical or intellectual disabilities or developmental delays. A serious illness may also be a reason for extended compulsory education.

The funding that municipalities receive from the state for pre-primary and basic education is based on the number of 6–15 year olds living in the municipality, based on unit prices. To even out local differences, certain factors increase the amount of these statutory government transfers. An increase is paid, for example, when schools are located in sparsely populated areas, if there is a high number of foreign language speakers, and if the parents' level of education is low.

The learners' right to support is stipulated in the Basic Education Act and in National Core Curriculum (see also 3.4). If municipalities do not follow the rules and legislation, there is no sanctioning; funding cannot be taken back or taken away from them.

The centre for learning and consulting, Valteri (former state-owned special schools), supplements the municipal learning and school attendance support services. Valteri operates under the Finnish National Agency for Education. Valteri supports the implementation of inclusive education by offering a comprehensive range of services in the fields of general, intensified and special support. The state financing of these services is 50%. Still, it might be too expensive for some municipalities.

Valteri training projects are financed by the Finnish National Board of Education and are free-of-charge for participants. The training courses offered by individual Valteri units are, for the most part, tailored training packages.

[European Agency, 2016, Financing inclusive education systems](#)



The central government transfer system is supplemented with various discretionary government transfers, which are awarded for education and training purposes and for development purposes. The resources are allocated from the Ministry of Education and Culture's share of the national budget.

The long-term programme 'Kelpo' supported local authorities with EUR 45 million in implementing the child's right to safe and high-standard instruction in a neighbourhood school (Development Plan Education and Research 2011–2016). It also consists of long-term in-service education and supported planning of local support and co-operation models.

Students with disabilities are entitled to receive assistance services, other student welfare services and any special aids required for studying. Some services are offered by the educational institution, whereas others are organised as services provided by the student's municipality of residence, in accordance with the Act on Services and Assistance for the Disabled. The Upper Secondary Schools Act provides that learners with disabilities and those who need special support for some other reason are entitled to assistance services, other teaching and learner welfare services, and special aids, as required in their studies.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has awarded state grants for the period 2020–2022 for the development of educational support and inclusion in municipalities and schools. In addition, the state grant has been awarded for hospital teaching. The consultative hospital teaching will be used to support a wider range of activities for learners whose problems are linked to bullying, mental health challenges, suicidal tendencies, depression and school absenteeism, among other things.

[European Agency, 2016, Financing inclusive education systems](#)

[Financing of General Education – Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland](#)

Programmes for quality and equality in early childhood and comprehensive school education

The Right to Learn development programmes (2020–2022) aim to secure an equal start for learning by improving quality and equality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and comprehensive school education. The programmes aim to strengthen quality and equality in ECEC and comprehensive school education by reducing and preventing learning differences and by strengthening support for learning. The Right to Learn incorporates legislative and financial changes, and promotes practices and methods that strengthen equality.

Early childhood education and care

Not only does ECEC lay the foundation for children's future learning; it also aims to reduce differences in learning that stem from their family backgrounds. The objective of the programme is to find ways for more children to participate in ECEC. By enhancing pre-primary and early primary education, it will improve the early learning of basic skills and provide better support for such learning.



Right to Learn goals for ECEC reflect the commitment: to ensure equal conditions for learning paths, ensure a more flexible start for learning, to promote learning support and to improve the quality of ECEC.

Comprehensive school education

Comprehensive school guarantees everyone equal opportunities to learn the skills they need in life. The Right to Learn programme aims to identify effective measures to reverse the growth of inequality and to reduce group sizes. The objective is to reduce and prevent learning differences arising from children's socio-economic status, immigrant background or gender, to strengthen support for learning and for special needs, and to improve literacy.

Right to Learn goals for comprehensive school education reflect the commitment: to strengthen learning outcomes and equality in education, make available better support for children, and strengthen the quality of teaching.

[Right to Learn development programmes – Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland](#)

Evaluative commentary

This section provides a qualified, evidenced-based reflection on the **challenges, opportunities and consequences** of system features and structures for the implementation of inclusive education in practice. It specifically considers the impact of policy-making, structures and processes at national, regional, local and school levels on inclusive education practice.

There's no more specific, targeted reflection, but some suitable doctoral studies that provide insights into the questions asked:

Ahtiainen, R., 2017. [Shades of change in Fullan's and Hargreaves's models: Theoretical change perspectives regarding Finnish special education reform](#). Helsinki Studies in Education

Pulkkinen, J., 2019. [Reforming policy, changing practices?: special education in Finland after educational reforms](#).

Paju, B., 2021. [An expanded conceptual and pedagogical model of inclusive collaborative teaching activities](#). Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki

Hienonen, N. 2020. [Does class placement matter? Students with special educational needs in regular or special classes](#). University of Helsinki



SECTION 3. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

This section provides information on the overall framework of legislation and policy governing the whole of the education system in the country.

3.1 Is there a single legislation and policy framework covering all learners in all educational settings?

Yes.

3.1a Description of the single legislation and policy framework

[Varhaiskasvatustalaki 540/2018](#)

[Laki varhaiskasvatustalain muuttamisesta 326/2022](#)

[Perusopetuslaki 628/1998](#)

Perusopetusasetus (Förordning): 11/20/1998, [852/1998 Basic Education Decree](#). The decree prescribes on the working time, instruction, groups, evaluation and assessment, learners' rights, etc.

Oppivelvollisuuslaki 1214/2020

Oppilas- ja opiskelijahuoltolaki 1287/2013

Lukiolaki 714/2018? Lukiolaki 714/2018

Laki ammatillisesta koulutuksesta 531/2017

[Lukioasetus \(Förordning\): 11/06/1998, 810/1998](#) General Upper Secondary Schools Decree. The decree prescribes on, e.g. instruction, counselling, planning the education, assessment, legal rights of the learner.

Valtioneuvoston asetus ammatillisen koulutuksen ja lukiokoulutuksen yhteishakujärjestelmästä (Förordning): 12/30/1998, [1197/1998 Decree](#) on the Joint Application System of General Upper Secondary and Vocational Education and Training.

Asetus ammatillisen koulutuksen ja lukiokoulutuksen yhteishausta: 17/01/2008, [30/2008 Decree](#) on the Joint Application System of General and Vocational Upper Secondary Education.

Asetus opetushallituksesta (Förordning): 12/4/2008, [805/2008 National Board of Education Decree](#).

Laki opetushallituksesta (Lag): 01/25/1991, [182/1991 National Board of Education Act](#). The act prescribes on the tasks, responsibilities and organisation of the Finnish National Board of Education.

Valtioneuvoston asetus koulutustoimikunnista ja koulutuksen yhteistyöneuvottelukunnasta (Förordning): 12/01/2000, 1005/2000 The decree prescribes on the composition and tasks of the [National Co-ordination Group for Education and Training](#).



Asetus opetusministeriöstä (Förordning): 4/6/2010, [310/2010 Ministry of Education Decree](#).

Asetus koulutuksen arvioinnista (Förordning): 02/20/2003, [150/2003 Education Evaluation Decree](#). The decree on the tasks and composition of the Finnish Education Evaluation Council. Replaced by 1061/2009.

Valtioneuvoston asetus koulutuksen arvioinnista (Förordning): 12/10/2009, [1061/2009 Education Evaluation Decree](#). The decree on the tasks and composition of the Finnish Education Evaluation Council.

Asetus opetus- ja kulttuuritoimen rahoituksesta (Förordning): 12/29/2009, [1766/2009 Decree on the Financing of the Provision of Education and Culture](#). The decree prescribes on the principles of the funding of education.

Laki opetus- ja kulttuuritoimen rahoituksesta (Lag): 12/29/2009, [1705/2009 Act on the Financing of the Provision of Education and Culture](#). The act prescribes on the statutory government funding of education and culture.

Asetus lukiokoulutuksen ja ammatillisen koulutuksen opiskelijoiden koulumatkatuesta (Förordning): 05/19/2004, [425/2004 Decree on the school transport subsidy](#) for general and vocational upper secondary education students.

Laki lukiokoulutuksen ja ammatillisen koulutuksen opiskelijoiden koulumatkatuesta (Lag): 01/10/1997, [48/1997 Act on school transport subsidy](#) of general and vocational upper secondary education students.

Laki opiskelijavalintarekisteristä ja ylioppilastutkintorekisteristä (Lag): 12/18/1998, [1058/1998 Act on admissions register and matriculation examination register](#).

Ylioppilastutkintoasetus (Förordning): 11/21/1994, [1000/1994 Matriculation Examination Decree](#). The decree prescribes on the organisation, examinations, examiners, assessment and examinees.

Laki valtion ja yksityisen järjestämän koulutuksen hallinnosta (Lag) : 08/21/1998, [634/1998 Act on the administration of education and training](#) provided by the state and private organisations.

Laki ylioppilastutkinnon järjestämisestä (Lag): 26.8.2005, [672/2005, Act on the provision of matriculation examination](#).

Opintotukiasetus (Förordning): 04/08/1994, [260/1994 Decree on Financial Aid for Students](#). The decree prescribes on the eligibility for students' financial aid and procedures.

Opintotukilaki (Lag): 01/21/1994, [65/1994 Act on Financial Aid for Students](#). The act prescribes on the studies that are entitled to students' financial aid.

[Eurydice, Finland, Legislation and official policy documents](#)

Early childhood education and care

The new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care came into force in 2018. The Act lays down provisions on the right of a child to early childhood education and care, organisation and provision of early childhood education and care, and the data repository for early



childhood education and care. Furthermore, the Act is applied, where appropriate, to the arrangement and provision of open early childhood education and care activities.

With regard to child assessment, at the ECEC level, there are no performance requirements. Instead, the focus is on the overall well-being of the child, with ECEC staff expected to systematically observe and document the child's development and learning, known as pedagogical documentation. The teacher then guides children by giving them daily encouragement and feedback on their strengths and development areas, with parents receiving regular feedback.

Basic education and pre-primary education

Basic Education Act and Basic Education Decree were stipulated in 1999. The Act governs compulsory education: pre-primary education and basic education. The Act concerns the objectives, contents, evaluation and levels of education as well as students' rights and responsibilities. Compared to prior legislation, the Act increased the independent decision-making powers of the local authorities, other education providers and schools.

Upper secondary education

The new Act on General Upper Secondary Education entered into force in 2018 (10.8.2018/714). The Act concerns for instance provision, the objectives, contents, student intake, evaluation and students' rights and responsibilities.

Vocational education and training is governed by the Act on Vocational Education and Training, which came into force in 2017. The Act regards, for example, provision, student intake, degrees, the objectives, contents, evaluation and students' rights and responsibilities, as well as data repository.

([Eurydice, Finland: Organisation and governance](#))

3.1b Overview of the general education legislation and policy framework guiding the whole system

Not applicable.

3.1c Overview of the specific education legislation and policy framework impacting on the inclusion of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

No information.

3.2 Is there a single curriculum framework covering all learners in all educational settings?

Yes.

3.2a Description of the single curriculum framework

[Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelmien perusteet](#)

National core curriculum for early childhood education and care is a national regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education.



[Esiopetuksen opetussuunnitelmien perusteet](#)

Curriculum for pre-primary education is a national regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education. Education providers draw up local pre-primary curricula and implement pre-primary education according to it.

[Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet](#)

National Curriculum for Basic Education is a national regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education. Education providers draw up local basic education curricula and implement basic education according to it.

[Tutkintokoulutukseen valmentava koulutus](#)

Preparatory education to upper secondary education (unofficial translation)

[Lukiokoulutus](#)

National Core Curriculum for upper secondary general education is a national regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education. Education providers draw up local upper secondary general education curricula and implement education according to it.

[Ammatillinen koulutus](#)

This page contains the current requirements for vocational upper secondary qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. Qualification requirements that will no longer be valid after a transition period and those that have been repealed can also be found on this page. Qualification requirements can be searched using the title of the requirements, the qualification title, the name of a competence area or the name of a unit that is part of the qualification.

3.2b Overview of the general curriculum framework

Not applicable.

3.2c Overview of specific curriculum framework(s) for different groups of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

Finland does not have specific curriculum framework for different groups of learners.

3.3 Is there a single legislation and policy framework for all teacher education and professional development?

No information.

3.3a Description of the single legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development

[Eurydice: 9. Teachers and education staff.](#)

3.3b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development

Asetus kasvatustieteellisen alan tutkinnoista ja opettajankoulutuksesta (Förordning):



04/21/1995, [576/1995 Decree on the Degrees in Education and Teacher Training](#). The decree prescribes on the following: degrees, studies of kindergarten teachers, class teachers, subject teachers, special needs teachers and guidance counsellors, pedagogical studies, further education, credit transfer and certifications.

Asetus ammatillisesta opettajankoulutuksesta (Förordning): 05/15/2003, [357/2003 Decree on Vocational Teacher Training](#). The decree prescribes on the following: studies and aims, degree structure, requirements for staff at vocational teacher education colleges.

Laki ammatillisesta opettajankoulutuksesta (Lag): 05/09/2003, [356/2003 Act on Vocational Teacher Training](#). The act prescribes on vocational teacher education, e.g. aims, administration and steering, instruction and studies, student admission, teachers.

Asetus opetustoimen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista (Förordning): 12/14/1998, [986/1998 Teaching Qualifications Decree](#). The decree prescribes on the qualification requirements of educational staff. Amended by 865/2005.

Opettajankoulutusasetus (Förordning): 06/13/1986, [486/1986 Teachers' education decree](#). The decree lists the faculties providing for teacher education. It prescribes on, e.g. qualifications of the teachers, their tasks, academic year, etc.

[Eurydice, Finland, Legislation and official policy documents](#)

The current [Teacher education development programme](#) focuses on admissions, initial education as well as development of professional competence and learning during the career. Students with the best capacity for teaching will be selected and the aptitude of applicants to teacher education is taken into account in the student admissions.

The working methods used in the teacher education and educational institutions emphasise a learner-oriented, research-based and whole-school approach. In addition, key issues are the new and diverse learning environments, team-teaching, cross-disciplinary approaches and teachers' management skills.

The faculties of education are responsible for providing education for ECEC teachers, class teachers (basic education), special needs education teachers and guidance counsellors, as well as for subject teacher education in home economics, crafts and, to some extent, music. Other subject teacher education is organised in co-operation between teacher education departments and subject departments and at art academies. Subject teacher education is provided by university faculties of different subjects. Pedagogical studies are provided by teacher education units within faculties of education. Teacher education in art subjects is offered by art academies. At universities of applied sciences, vocational teacher education is generally the responsibility of a department of teacher education.

All teacher qualifications comprise teacher's pedagogical studies of a scope of 60 ECTS points. Students can be assessed in a multitude of ways. The assessment is conducted by the teacher educators and the teachers in the schools where the students have undertaken their practical training. There is no separate accreditation procedure for teachers in Finland.

Students receive a degree certificate upon successful completion of all the required studies. If the student has been enrolled in concurrent teacher education, the pedagogical



studies are integrated into the certificate for the master's degree. Students who have completed separate teachers' pedagogical studies or vocational teacher studies, receive a separate certificate.

Teachers' pedagogical studies qualify teachers to work at any level or type of education. In addition to theoretical studies in pedagogy and didactics, these studies comprise practical training in schools. The periods of teaching practice included in pedagogical studies are organised at university teacher training schools and at so-called affiliated schools. In vocational education and training, most of the student teachers already work in a school and generally also do their practical training in these. At least part of the practice is supervised and assessed. The higher education institutions have autonomy regarding the length and scope of the teaching practice.

The teacher education institutions have full autonomy in designing their curricula. The autonomy and freedom of teacher education institutions allows for flexibility in the curricula to changing skills needs. The latest [recommendation for teacher education](#) from 2016 sets the following targets for teacher education and future teachers (until the end of 2023). For example:

- teachers' competence is broad-based;
- teachers are innovative, bold and creative experimenters and developers;
- teachers integrate a societal perspective into their work;
- teachers can develop their professionalism, school and instruction based on research;
- teachers can work in teams and networks.

All universities with special needs teacher training are implementing a development project called HOHTO. The project aims to strengthen the special educational skills and technological and pedagogical skills of teacher educators to support well-being and learning during the years 2021–2022. The themes of education are

1. diversity and support of learning;
2. well-being, interdisciplinary and multi-professional competence;
3. social community and emotions.

The project will operate on networks where teacher educators are working together with colleagues from early childhood education, class teacher education and subject teacher education. The University of Lapland co-ordinates the project, and it is carried out in co-operation with the universities of Oulu, Eastern Finland, Jyväskylä, Turku, Helsinki and Åbo Akademi. As educators of future teachers, especially, the teacher educators are the key to supporting the well-being and learning of all children and young people.

[HOHTO project website in English](#)

Initial teacher education

In early childhood education and care (ECEC), teachers are required to hold a bachelor's degree. The staff structure of centre-based ECEC (integrated ISCED 010 and 020) includes two other job titles of qualified education and care staff: social pedagogues and



childcarers. Social pedagogues in ECEC have a bachelor's degree from a university of applied sciences. Childcarers in ECEC are required to hold a vocational upper secondary qualification (ISCED 3) provided by universities of applied sciences.

From 2030, at least 2/3 of staff are required to hold a higher education degree, and at least 50% of these must be ECEC teacher's degrees. Teachers in pre-primary education have university education. They are either ECEC teachers with a minimum of a bachelor's degree or qualified ECEC teachers who can continue their studies to become special education teachers in ECEC, or to complete a master's degree with an orientation to education or early childhood education and care.

In general basic and upper secondary education all teachers are required to have a master's degree. In vocational education teachers should have a master's degree or bachelor's degree. Teacher training can be either concurrent, with pedagogical training integrated into the master's programme, or consecutive, with the pedagogical training completed after the initial degree.

Class teacher and ECEC teacher education is organised concurrently, that is, the pedagogical training and subject studies are intertwined. The length of ECEC teacher education is three years (180 ECTS) and class teacher education five years (300 ECTS). Class teacher education consists of basic, subject and advanced studies in education, minor subject studies and teaching practice. Class teachers may provide instruction in all subjects in grades 1–6. They may specialise in teaching one or several subjects in their minor subject studies. Completion of an extensive course in a minor subject (studies in the teaching subject of at least 60 ECTS credits included in subject teacher education) will also give eligibility for functioning as a subject teacher in grades 1–9 of basic education. The majority of currently graduating class teachers have acquired both class and subject teaching qualifications.

In subject teacher education, students usually first apply to study a particular subject at the relevant university faculty and, after one or two years of studying, apply for subject teacher education. At some universities and faculties, students may also apply directly for subject teacher education. In such cases, education is provided in co-operation between the department of teacher education, the relevant subject departments and teacher training schools. The department of teacher education is responsible for providing pedagogical studies, whereas subject departments of different faculties provide education in the teaching subjects. These studies are taken in parallel and in interaction with each other. The length of subject teacher education is five to six years.

Education for teachers at vocational institutions partly differs from the training of teachers at general educational institutions. **Vocational teacher education** is always consecutive for teachers of vocational studies. Teachers first acquire vocational education in their own subject field and, after three years of working practice in their own field, complement this with teachers' pedagogical studies. Teachers of common core subjects in vocational education and training have the same training as subject teachers in general education.

As most vocational student teachers already work as teachers, the training programmes are more and more flexible and personalised in vocational teacher education institutions. Since 2005, virtual teacher education programmes have also been offered.



The studies are conducted in close co-operation between the teacher education institutions and vocational schools in the field. As many teacher students in vocational teacher education are in employment, the studies are designed so that they can be conducted flexibly in one to three years. The aim with the flexible study arrangements has been to connect the teacher education with the development of the teachers' own work and the activities of their institutions. It is also common to draw up an individual learning programme for teacher education together with each student teacher so that the studies build on their prior learning.

Vocational teacher education colleges offer special needs teacher education, which qualifies teachers to work as special needs teachers at vocational institutions. Most special needs teachers work at vocational special institutions. The aim is to train experts who, in addition to their own educational work, can supervise the special pedagogical work of other teachers and the institution as a whole. Commonly, the education is implemented as alternating periods of in-class study and distance study. Programmes generally consist of development projects related to special needs teaching, assignments and teaching practice. The various stages of the education may be very individual and include personal focuses related to the students' backgrounds, competences and expectations ([Eurydice, Finland: Teachers and education staff](#)).

Continuing professional development

Continuing education is compulsory for teachers. In general education, teachers are obliged to participate in training for a minimum of three days per year. There is no formal link between continuing education and promotion. Teachers have the right to participate in this obligatory training with full salary benefits.

The education providers carry primary responsibility for continuing teacher education. Teachers themselves have, however, been given greater responsibility for developing their professional skills and expertise. More and more attention is being paid to self-motivated continuing education. Local authorities support it within their financial limits and with financial support from the state.

The state is primarily responsible for continuing education that is important for implementing education policy and which promotes its aims. Education providers and teachers are supported by government funding in terms of reforms significant to education policy. Special needs education and inclusive education have been among the priorities during the last seven to eight years. To develop inclusive education strategies, the Kelpo project provided in-service training.

Universities' teacher education departments, continuous professional development centres (e.g. [Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting](#)) and the National Agency for Education provide teachers with further education and continuous professional development every year. Process-based courses can include consultations and workplace consultancy.

Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting organises national, regional, local and school-specific training courses and seminars. Courses can consist of long-term training and development processes or compact training sessions focusing on specific topics. Process-based courses can also include consultations and workplace counselling ([Support for learning and school attendance - Valteri](#)).



Valteri training projects are financed by the Finnish National Board of Education and are free of charge for participants. The training courses offered by individual Valteri units are, for the most part, tailored training packages. The potential topics and content of tailored training courses are described in the course calendar and on the websites of each Valteri unit ([European Agency, Country information for Finland, Teacher education for inclusion; ibid., Financing of inclusive education systems: Finland country report](#)).

3.3c Overview of specific legislation and policy framework for teacher education and professional development and what and who this specific framework focuses on

Special needs teacher education

In early childhood education and care special education teachers are required to hold an ECEC teacher qualification and specialisation in special needs education. The specialisation of 60 ECTS can be included in the ECEC teacher qualification or taken separately. It is possible to study special needs education as a major and take the higher first degree.

There are two ways to study to become a special needs teacher or special class teacher:

1. **Special needs teachers** and **special class teachers** get a master's degree in educational science (300 ECTS). The main subject is special education. These degrees qualify to serve as a special needs teacher or special class teacher in primary, secondary and upper secondary levels. Special needs teacher studies focus on the deviations in development of children and young people, recognition and diagnostics of learning abilities, as well as planning and implementation of intervention and other teaching.
2. You can apply for a **separate course in special education** (60 ECTS) if you have completed the studies for class teacher or subject teacher and the basic studies in special education (25 ECTS). The 60-credit course in special education provides professional skills and formal qualifications for special education. The key objectives of the intensive one-semester course are to reconcile theory and practice, to develop theoretical thinking in support of teaching and to network with experts in the field. During the course of their studies, students will develop as research teachers and gain an insight into the scope of the field of special needs education and training and the importance of continuous learning.

In general education, the requirement is specialisation studies of 60 ECTS after teaching qualification. **Vocational teacher education** colleges offer special needs teacher education with a scope of 60 ECTS credits, which qualifies teachers to work as special needs teachers at vocational institutions. Also for these studies there is a prerequisite of a teacher qualification. Most special needs teachers work at vocational special institutions. Similarly to all teacher education, the interaction of theory and practice and an investigative approach are considered central ([Eurydice, Finland: Teachers and education staff](#)).

Teacher educators

The qualification requirements for teacher educators are the same as for other teaching posts in higher education institutions. Each university defines the qualification requirements in their own regulations. Generally, university teachers are required at least a master's degree and good teaching skills. Lecturers at universities are generally required



a postgraduate licentiate's or doctor's degree and good teaching skills. In teacher training, schools are affiliated to the teacher education faculties. The requirement is a teacher qualification and teaching experience.

In vocational teacher education institutions, the qualification requirements are the same as for universities of applied sciences in general and defined in the legislation. Thus, teacher educators who are appointed lecturers are required to hold a master's degree and pedagogical training, while principal lecturers are required to hold the postgraduate licentiate's degree ([Eurydice, Finland, Teachers and education staff](#)).

3.4 Is there a single legislation and policy framework to ensure support for all learners throughout their school careers?

No.

3.4a Description of the single legislation and policy framework that ensures support for all throughout their school careers

Early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) aims to promote children's holistic growth, development and learning in collaboration with their guardians. ECEC promotes equality and equity among children and prevents their social exclusion. Knowledge and skills acquired in ECEC strengthen children's participation and active agency in society. In addition, ECEC supports guardians in educating their children and makes it possible for them to work or study.

Support for the child's development and learning is part of high-quality ECEC activities. Each child in need of support is entitled to receive it. The child's need for support shall be recognised and appropriate support shall be arranged as the need arises, in cross-sectoral co-operation if necessary. Sufficiently early and correctly targeted support may promote the child's development, learning and well-being. At the same time, the support may be used to prevent problems from emerging. ECEC is developed in accordance with the principles of inclusion in Finland.

The organisation of support is based on each child's strengths and needs related to learning and development. The support for development and learning meets the child's individual needs, as well as the needs of the ECEC community and learning environment. All children must feel accepted as themselves and as members of the group.

Primarily, support is provided through diverse flexible arrangements in the child's own ECEC or family day-care group. When evaluating the size of the group of children, the best interests and support needs of the children and the ability to achieve the goals set for ECEC are considered.

ECEC may include child- or group-specific assistants, who support the child or children and enable their participation in activities. Support can also be partly provided in a special needs group if it is in the child's best interests.

All staff are responsible for observing and providing children's needs for support, according to their education, job descriptions and duties. Special ECEC teachers educate



children in need of support and consult with and guide other staff. When necessary, social and health care service experts participate in planning, implementing and evaluating children's need for support.

The individual ECEC plan outlines the support a child needs. The plan includes the responsibilities and division of duties for supporting the child's development and learning and their implementation and assessment methods.

The implementation and effectiveness of the support is evaluated and the plan revised and changed, if necessary, at least once a year. Records are kept of how the objectives have been achieved, and goals must be revised to correspond with changing needs. The plan must indicate if support is no longer needed and the measures have been discontinued. The need for support is always re-assessed when the child begins pre-primary education. The National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education outlines the regulations on support for the growth and learning of children in pre-primary education.

Pre-primary education and basic education

In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a steering group to prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy for the development of special needs education in pre-primary and basic education. The steering group proposed that the current practice be changed to focus on earlier support and prevention. **General and intensified support** were adopted as the primary forms of support **before a decision on special support** is made. The intensified support bolsters learning and growth and prevents the aggravation and escalation of problems related to learning, social interaction or development. The changes to the Basic Education Act came into force on 1 January 2011, but the provisions on learner welfare and data protection were applied from 1 August 2010.

The Finnish National Agency for Education revised the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary and Basic Education according to the new provisions, and they were also adopted on 1 January 2011. The amendment adds provisions on pre-primary and basic education and support given to learners. It aims to strengthen learners' rights to early, preventive support in learning and growth and special support, if needed. The support intensifies by stages: general support, intensified support and special support. Provisions on the processing and confidentiality of personal data and learner welfare services were also amended and supplemented.

A learner has the right to receive instruction and guidance in accordance with the curriculum and sufficient support in learning and school attendance, as soon as the need arises (amended Section 30). On every school day, every learner has the right to receive support and counselling. The support is a collaborative effort involving all teachers, the learner and their parents and, where needed, learner welfare personnel. Special needs education is provided, taking into consideration the learner's interests and the facilities for providing education, in conjunction with other instruction, or partly or totally in a special needs classroom or another appropriate facility.

Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education is defined in the Basic Education Act. It is for 6-year-olds, and can be implemented in either ECEC centres or schools. Pre-primary education builds on the



basic values of society. These are stipulated in national legislation and international declarations, recommendations and conventions which endeavour to safeguard human rights and global viability. The role of pre-primary education is to promote children's growth into humane individuals and ethically responsible members of society. It does this by guiding them towards responsible action and compliance with generally accepted rules and towards appreciation for other people. The core role of pre-primary education is to promote children's favourable growth, development and learning opportunities. It shall support and monitor physical, psychological, social, cognitive and emotional development and prevent any difficulties that may arise. Early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and basic education form an integrated whole, progressing consistently in terms of children's development.

Children whose conditions for development, growth and learning have been affected by illness, disability or reduced functional ability need special support in pre-primary education. In addition, children who need psychological or social support for their growth receive special support. Children whose development involves risk factors related to learning potential, according to experts in education and learner welfare services and parents or other guardians, are entitled to special support. In addition, special support in pre-primary education is provided for children who are within extended compulsory education or whose basic education has been deferred for one year, and for children admitted or transferred to special education during pre-primary education.

The physical and social learning environment and the necessary support services in children's pre-primary education is primarily organised to enable children to participate in group activities as fully as possible.

Children participating in education are entitled to receive sufficient support for growth and learning as soon as the need for support becomes apparent. Categories in the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education are general support, intensified support and special support.

Development and support in pre-primary education comprises objectives agreed together with children's parents, which uphold basic security and support children's holistic growth. The primary concern is to support the development of each child's positive self-concept and healthy self-esteem and to ensure equal membership of the peer group. Work in pre-primary education should be playful and involve action-based group and individual guidance stemming from children's developmental level. It should promote children's cognitive – and in particular, linguistic – and socio-emotional development and their ability to learn new things, and prevent learning difficulties.

Attention must be on early identification of learning barriers and difficulties. Those in education are entitled to receive sufficient support for learning and growth as soon as the need for support becomes apparent. Early identification of support needs requires continuous assessment of children's growth and learning, and provision of support must be initiated at a sufficiently early stage. This will prevent aggravation and long-term effects of problems. Provision of the right support measures at the right time and level is the key to safeguarding growth and learning.

The support received by children must be flexible, long-term and must change in keeping with support needs. Different forms of support are used both individually and in



combination with each other. Support is provided for as long as necessary and at the appropriate level. Particular care is taken to ensure continuing support as a child moves from ECEC to pre-primary education and from pre-primary to basic education.

Support for growth, learning and school attendance falls into three categories in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education: general support, intensified support and special support.

According to government analysis, assessment and research activities (55/2018), the educational support model from early childhood to the transition to upper secondary education mainly functions well. However, more resources and professionals are required, particularly for part-time special education. A recommendation for improvement was regional equality, from the point of view of economic resources and the availability of competent experts.

Basic education

The starting points for provision of teaching and support are the strengths, learning needs and development needs of both the whole teaching group and each individual learner. Learning and school attendance require support solutions based on community spirit and the learning environment, as well as meeting learners' individual needs. When planning instruction and support, it is imperative to bear in mind that support needs may vary from temporary to continuous, from minor to major, or from one to several forms of support.

Every learner must be given an opportunity to succeed in learning, develop as a learner, and grow and refine themselves as a person on their own terms. Diverse learners, different learning styles and starting points for learning, as well as learners' cultural backgrounds, must be taken into account. Special attention must be given to early identification of learning barriers and difficulties.

The school management is responsible for decisions relating to provision and implementation of support and for taking these into account in all year groups and subjects. Pedagogical expertise and co-operation between teachers play an important role in identifying support needs and in planning and implementing support. Where necessary, support is planned and implemented as part of multi-disciplinary learner welfare work. Learners and their parents or guardians are provided with information about support measures and given an opportunity to express their views on the provision of support. Each learner is provided with support at their own school through various flexible arrangements, unless its provision inevitably requires the learner to be transferred to another teaching group or school. Particular care is taken to ensure continuing support as a learner moves from pre-primary to basic education and from basic education to the upper secondary level, or if they change schools during basic education.

General support, intensified support and special support

As in pre-primary education, support for studies and learner welfare falls into three categories in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education: **general support, intensified support and special support.**

Support measures form a systematic continuum, as shown in figure 1. Particular care is taken to ensure continuing support as a learner moves from ECEC to pre-primary



education, from pre-primary to basic education, and from basic education to secondary education.

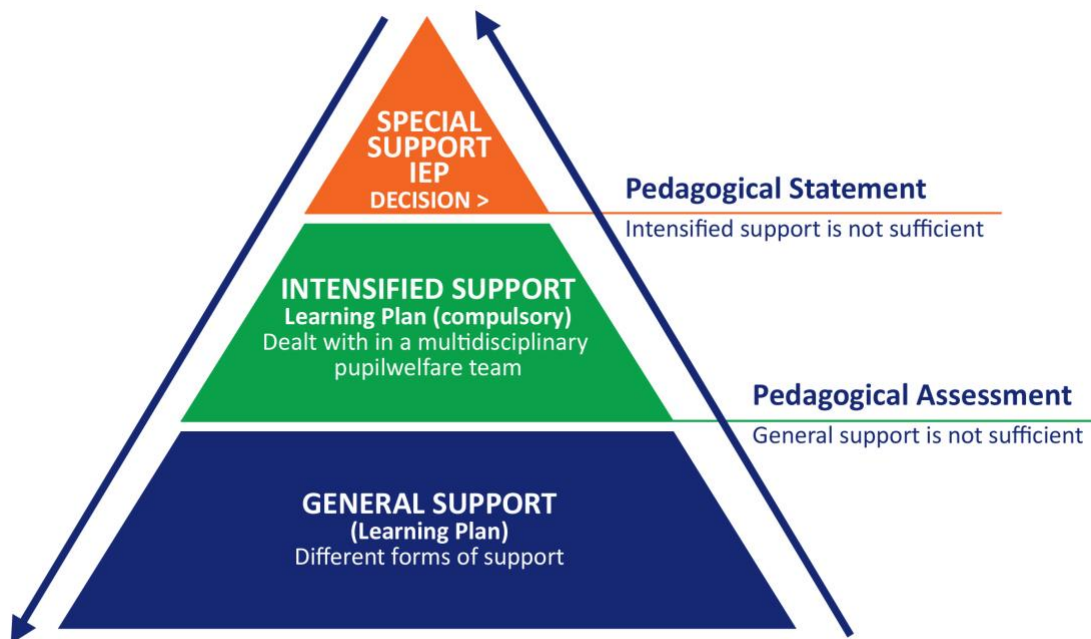


Figure 1. Types of support available in educational settings

General support

Every learner has a right to high-quality education as well as an opportunity to receive guidance and support for learning and school attendance on all school days. All learners' abilities and needs must be taken into account in schoolwork. Caring, concern and a good atmosphere in a school community promote learners' development and support good learning.

Teachers are responsible for taking the different abilities and needs of each learner and the whole teaching group into account. Co-operation with parents and guardians, other teachers and staff members, and different experts contributes to success in this respect. The teacher helps learners to recognise their own resources, learning-related strengths and development challenges. Special attention is focused on learners' learning abilities and their opportunity to assume responsibility for setting objectives, planning, implementing and assessing their own learning. Learners' self-esteem, study motivation and learning-to-learn skills are consolidated in all learning situations and subjects.

Teaching tasks also include guidance, counselling and learner welfare. Any support needs in terms of learning and school attendance are met by differentiating instruction, through co-operation among teachers and by modifying teaching groups in a flexible manner. The role of these arrangements becomes pronounced in combined-class instruction. Schools may use remedial teaching, learning plans, part-time special needs education and assistants' contributions to meet the support needs of teaching groups or individual learners even before transition to the intensified support stage.

It is also possible to influence learners' well-being and learning motivation through morning and afternoon activities, provided that these are offered by the education



provider concerned. Planning these to form part of the learners' day also makes it possible to increase experiences of safety, security and community spirit.

Intensified support

Learners who need regular support for their learning or school attendance or who need several forms of support at the same time must be provided with intensified support. This is based on a pedagogical assessment in accordance with a learning plan prepared for the learner. Intensified support is provided when general support is not sufficient.

Intensified support is planned as a whole for each individual learner. It is by nature more intense and persistent than general support. Intensified support systematically supports the learner's learning and school attendance and is designed to prevent problems from escalating, diversifying and accumulating.

It is possible to make use of all forms of support available in basic education during intensified support, with the exception of special needs education provided on the basis of a decision on special support. Subject syllabi cannot be individualised at the intensified support stage. Conversely, part-time special needs education, individual guidance counselling, flexible teaching groups and home-school co-operation play a more prominent role. In addition, learner welfare services play a more substantial role in promoting and maintaining learners' well-being. Support must be organised according to each learner's developmental phase and individual needs in terms of quality and quantity. It is important to ensure learners have opportunities to gain experiences of success in learning and as group members to support their positive perception of themselves and schoolwork.

During a period of intensified support, each learner's learning and school attendance is regularly monitored and assessed. If a learner's situation changes, the learning plan is revised to match their need for support.

In accordance with provisions for the individual learner, initiating and organising intensified support and, where necessary, transition back to general support are based on pedagogical assessment or other work by a multi-disciplinary learner welfare team. After this process, intensified support measures for the learner are recorded in the learner's individual education plan.

A learner who needs regular support for their learning or school attendance or who needs several forms of support at once receives intensified support based on their own prepared learning plan. The support measures are recorded in the learner's individual education plan. A learning plan is always drawn up for a learner receiving intensified support. Unless there is an evident obstacle to doing so, **the learning plan** must be drawn up in co-operation with the learner and their parents or guardians and, where necessary, any other legal representative of the learner. During a period of intensified support, systematic planning of studies and support measures will support the learner's learning, growth and development.

Special support

Special support is for learners who cannot adequately achieve their growth, development or learning objectives through other support measures. Special support may be part of either general or extended compulsory education. It consists of special needs education



based on a decision on special support and other forms of support available in basic education. It can include the whole range of support measures available in basic education.

The purpose of special support is to provide learners with holistic and systematic support that enables them to complete their compulsory education and builds a foundation for continuing their studies when they leave comprehensive school. Learners' self-esteem and study motivation are reinforced, and they are encouraged to assume responsibility for their studies within the limits of their own abilities.

Provision of special support requires education providers to make a decision in writing. Prior to making a decision on special support, the education provider must consult the learner and their parents, guardians or legal representatives and prepare a pedagogical statement on the learner. The need for special support must be revised at least after the second year class and before transferring to the seventh year class. It must be reviewed during pre-primary and compulsory education whenever the learner's support needs change. For this purpose, a new pedagogical statement is prepared for the learner. If there is a need for on-going support, the decision to continue special support will be made. If the learner no longer needs special support, support measures are terminated. In the latter case, the learner starts to receive intensified support.

Any matters that are significant in terms of the learner's legal protection and provision of instruction are determined in the decision on special support. The decision on special support must also determine the learner's primary teaching group, any possible interpretation, assistance or other services and, where necessary, divergent teaching arrangements for the learner. Individualisation of a syllabus requires a decision on special support.

A psychological or medical evaluation may indicate that a learner cannot be provided with education due to disability, illness, developmental delay or an emotional disorder, or for another special reason. In this case, a decision on special support may be made prior to or during pre-primary or basic education without a pedagogical statement or provision of intensified support for learning. If a decision on special support is made during basic education without providing intensified support, it must be based on a re-assessment of the learner's situation, for example as a result of an accident or serious illness.

Support measures may include factors relating to teaching and counselling staff, learner welfare services, assistants and other necessary services, teaching methods and working approaches, learning methods, and materials and equipment. In addition to the pedagogical statement, other necessary statements, such as a psychological or medical statement or an equivalent social statement, must be obtained to prepare a decision on special support.

In order to implement a decision on special support issued for a learner, the learner must have an **individual education plan (IEP)**. An IEP is a written pedagogical document based on the approved curriculum. It must indicate the provision of education and other support in accordance with the decision on special support issued for the learner.

An IEP serves to provide persistent support for the learner's individual learning and growth process. It is a target plan relating to the learner's learning and schooling. It covers educational content, pedagogical methods and other necessary support measures.



The plan must be revised as required and at least once per school year to correspond to the learner's needs. The IEP is revised whenever the learner's support needs or teaching objectives change.

Instead of subjects, instruction for people with severe disabilities is divided into functional domains: motor skills, language and communication, social skills, skills in daily activities and cognitive skills. Instruction for learners with other disabilities or serious illnesses may also be organised by **activity areas** for reasons relating to the learners' health.

Students who need special support can apply to mainstream vocational institutions within the national joint application system or through the related flexible application procedure. They can also apply directly or, in some cases, through the joint application system to educational institutions with special educational tasks. Counsellors in basic education and vocational education and training aim to find a suitable place for each learner according to their wishes.

Vocational education and training

In vocational education and training, learners who need special educational or welfare services receive special education and training. An individual education plan is drawn up for each learner receiving special education and training. This plan sets out details of:

- the qualification to be completed and its scope;
- the national core curriculum or the requirements of the competence-based qualification observed in education and training;
- the individual curriculum drawn up for the learner;
- grounds for providing special education and training;
- special educational and learner welfare services required for study;
- other services and support measures provided for the learner.

Each education provider is responsible for organising special education and training services for learners who need them.

Upper secondary general education

Learners are entitled to special needs education and other support as required by personal needs, which enables an equal treatment of learners. Learners studying at general upper secondary education are also entitled to receive personal and other guidance that meets their study-related needs and plans for further studies. Learners will also compile their personal study plan that contains a study plan, a matriculation examination plan, and a plan for further studies and career.

[What is general upper secondary education? Finnish National Agency for Education](#)

The Upper-Secondary Schools Act (629/1998) provides that learners with disabilities and other special needs are entitled to assistance services, other teaching and learner welfare services and special aids, as required in their studies.

In its Regulation dated 11 December 2020, the Matriculation Examination Board issued instructions for completing the matriculation examination. Reasons for poor test



performance are taken into account in the matriculation examination. The following will be taken into account: illness or disability, difficult situation in life, difficulties in reading and writing or a lack of knowledge of the language of instruction. Every year, about 1,750 candidates present medical certificates to the board requesting relaxation of the terms for completing the matriculation examination or exemption from completing a specific part of the examination. For example, deaf learners may request exemption from listening comprehension tests ([European Agency, Country information: Systems of support and specialist provision](#)).

3.4b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework that ensures support for the majority of learners throughout their school careers

No information.

3.4c Overview of the specific legislation and policy framework that ensures support for learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education throughout their school careers

See 3.4a.

More, in particular:

Support for learners' emotional and social skills

The values underpinning general education are human rights, equality and democracy, and the acceptance of multiculturalism. The school community encounters the challenges of a diverse and differentiated society. Learners have the right to a safe growth and learning environment, but tolerance has not advanced in the expected way. In international terms, young Finns feel that their ability to influence is meagre. It is necessary to enhance the acceptance of difference and equal treatment of individuals. Schools should stress inclusion, well-being, safety and respect for fellow beings.

It is important to prevent bullying, discrimination and racism. Action to eradicate bullying is on-going, with special emphasis on racist discrimination and bullying. Measures will be taken to strengthen the schools' role in developing learners' emotional and social skills and to support learners' inclusion and communality. Action to combat bullying will be stepped up. Education for tolerance and good conduct will be increased in schools.

Support for learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools

According to the Basic Education Act, those participating in education are entitled to sufficient support for learning and school attendance directly as the need arises – Section 30(1) of the Basic Education Act (642/2010). To ensure the early identification of needs for support, the progress of the learners in learning and the state of their school attendance must be continuously assessed. The school's operating methods, teaching arrangements and learning environments as well as their suitability for the learner are examined first. On the basis of this examination, it is assessed whether it is possible to implement more suitable pedagogical solutions by making changes in these aspects.

It is the duty of the municipality and the individual school to include learners with special educational needs (SEN) in the mainstream education system. The first alternative to providing special needs support is to include learners with SEN in mainstream classes and,



when necessary, provide special needs education in small teaching groups. Only when this is not feasible is the second alternative considered: the provision of special needs education in a special group, class or school.

Primarily, support is provided for a learner in their own teaching group and school by means of various flexible arrangements, unless the learner's best interests necessitate their transfer to another teaching group or school in order to provide support. In particular, it should be ensured that the provision of support continues as the child moves from pre-primary to basic education, within basic education, or from basic education to upper secondary education and training (European Agency, Financing of inclusive education systems: Finland Country report).

Special ECEC teachers provide special needs education for ECEC and pre-primary children. Special needs teachers provide part-time special needs education in compulsory and upper secondary education, while learners who receive special support in special classes are taught by special needs class teachers. Vocational special needs teachers work in both mainstream vocational institutions and special vocational institutions.

In addition to special needs teachers, educational services also employ assistants, educational guidance and school welfare officers, psychologists, doctors, learner counsellors and various therapists. State-owned special schools and vocational special institutions also have social workers, nursing and accommodation staff and other staff, for example, to cover school transport ([European Agency, Country information for Finland, Teacher education for inclusion](#)).

Valteri (former state-owned special schools) supplements the education providers' learning and school attendance support services. The forms, content and practical implementations of support services vary according to needs for support at various stages of support. Valteri operates under the Finnish National Agency for Education. The Valteri supports the implementation of inclusive education by offering a comprehensive range of services in the fields of general, intensified and special support. Valteri consists of the services of six national learning and consulting centres in various parts of Finland. The service offered by the Valteri can target the needs of individual learners or the needs of an entire working community, municipality or region. They can include, for example:

- consultation visits and counselling for day-care centres and schools;
- support periods for learners;
- evaluation and rehabilitation services for individual learners;
- workplace counselling and in-service training for professional personnel.

In addition, Valteri Centre for support for learning and consulting produce materials for the planning and implementation of support services.

Valteri has special expertise in support needs related to autism spectrum disorders, neuropsychiatric disorders, language and communication, hearing, vision, mobility and motoric functions, and neurological illnesses or other chronic illnesses as well as multiple needs ([European Agency, 2016, Financing inclusive education systems: Finland Country report](#)).



Special schools

The school administration reforms in the 1990s, when decision-making was decentralised to the municipalities, reduced the number of special schools, while special classes have been founded in mainstream schools. The state maintains two special schools, including 11 units, that provide comprehensive school education. These schools are intended, for example, for learners with hearing or visual impairments, or with a physical or other impairment, or out-of-home care learners. These schools are Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting and state-owned Reform school.

Education in hospitals and the education of learners in custody

Arrangements for a learner's instruction and necessary support require particular consideration, particularly when the learner is seriously ill or in a difficult life situation. In this case, basic education may be provided in a hospital school, a reform school, a reception centre, or a prison or other penal institution.

If organising instruction in other ways is not in the best interests of the learner, regardless of support measures referred to in the Basic Education Act or other legislation, municipalities in which the hospitals are located must organise instruction for learners who are patients in the hospital, as far the learner's state of health allows. They must also organise instruction and support for learners subject to compulsory education who are receiving other specialised medical care. This must take into account the learner's health, specific pedagogical needs, and treatment and rehabilitative procedures.

Municipalities in which other types of specialised medical care units are located may also organise instruction for learners receiving care. The goals of instruction for learners in specialised medical care include maintaining their learning and school attendance, and holistic rehabilitation that supports the learner's treatment. Cross-sectoral co-operation between the learner's education provider and the municipality in which the hospital is located allows them to agree upon and organise the requisite support for learners as they are transferred to hospital schools or back to their own schools. Distance learning may also be used in hospital schools. The learner's home municipality must pay compensation to another education provider for learners in a hospital school.

Education of learners placed outside their homes is the responsibility of the municipality in which the learners are placed. The education of learners placed in child welfare institutions is the responsibility of the school operated by the institution. The home municipality of children placed under the Child Welfare Act must pay compensation to another education provider.

Subject to agreement, the municipality may assign a school in another municipality, a school maintained by a private organisation or foundation that has an authorisation to provide education, or a state school as the learner's local school, instead of a school in their home municipality.

[European Agency, Country information for Finland, Systems of support and specialist provision](#)

[UNESCO, Education profiles. Finland: non-state actors in education](#)



3.5 Is there a single legislation and policy framework to ensure support for all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life?

No.

3.5a Description of the single legislation and policy framework that ensures support for all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

See 3.4a. Support measures form a systematic continuum, as shown in figure 1. Particular care is taken to ensure continuing support as a learner moves from ECEC to preprimary education, from pre-primary to basic education, and from basic education to secondary education ([European Agency, Country information for Finland, Systems of support and specialist provision](#)).

3.5b Overview of the general legislation and policy framework that ensures support for the majority of learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

[Perusopetuslaki 628/1998](#)

[Oppivelvollisuuslaki 1214/2020](#)

3.5c Overview of the specific legislation and policy framework that ensures support for learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

Transition period

Preparatory Education for Vocational Qualifications (TUVA) started on 1 August 2022. TUVA combines the previous supplementary basic education, preparatory education for upper secondary general education (LUVA) and preparatory education for vocational qualifications (VALMA).

TUVA is intended for learners who:

- do not have a secondary school qualification;
- for one reason or another, need preparatory education.

TUVA is aimed at both those in compulsory education and adults who need preparation and/or guidance for transition to upper secondary education or vocational training.

[What is preparatory education and training for qualifications \(TUVA\)?](#)

Evaluative commentary

This section provides a qualified, evidenced-based reflection on the **challenges, opportunities and consequences** of the legislative and policy framework for inclusive education in practice. It specifically considers the main challenges and opportunities for effectively translating policy into regional, local and school level practice.



The challenges, opportunities and consequences have been considered in the Report of Right to Learn working group. There is background information and recommendations for the future development work and for the next government programme.

The [background is only available in Finnish](#), but the recommendations are also in English.



SECTION 4. SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

This section provides information on aspects of governance across and between different system levels, bodies and stakeholders in the country.

4.1 Shared responsibilities across and between central and local government

Governance in Finland is based on the principle of decentralisation. Although the [Ministry of Education and Culture](#) defines education policy and the [Finnish National Agency for Education](#) is responsible for its implementation, local authorities have a significant amount of autonomy and responsibility.

Ministry of Education and Culture

Education policy is defined by parliament and government. The Ministry of Education and Culture is the highest authority and is responsible for all publicly funded education in Finland. It is responsible for preparing educational legislation and its share of the state budget for the government.

There are several expert bodies supporting the work of the Ministry, such as the National Forum for Skills Anticipation, National Sports Council and State Youth Council. National evaluations of learning outcomes are organised by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

Finnish National Agency for Education

The [Finnish National Agency for Education](#) is a national development agency, which works in close co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Culture to develop educational objectives, content and methods for early childhood, pre-primary, basic, upper secondary and adult education and training. It is not responsible for higher education.

It draws up and approves the national core curricula and requirements of qualifications for pre-primary and basic education, general and vocational upper secondary education. In addition to the core curricula, the Agency monitors and develops educational expenditure and allocated state subsidies, and assists the Ministry of Education and Culture in the preparation of education policy decisions.

Regional level

At regional level there are several bodies which are responsible for tasks concerning education. There are six Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVIs) and 15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY). AVIs co-operate with the ELY Centres in educational tasks.

[Regional State Administrative Agencies \(AVIs\)](#) are responsible for the regional tasks of the Ministry of Education and Culture. AVIs also promote the fulfilment of legal protection of learners and assesses regional and equal access to basic services. The agencies work in close collaboration with local authorities.



[Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment \(ELY\)](#) plan, monitor and develop adult education. Additionally, ELY Centres are responsible for development of vocational and adult education and matters concerning the financing of the European Social Fund (ESF) projects. They also help to develop upper secondary and higher education with EU project funding.

Regional councils draw up regional development plans in co-operation with the local authorities within their respective regions and the state authorities, as well as representatives of economic life and non-governmental organisations. A central objective of the legislation on regional policy is to support the self-motivated and balanced development of regions.

Local level

Local administration is mainly managed by the local authorities. Most commonly these are municipalities or joint municipal authorities which have self-government and the right to impose taxes. The local authorities are responsible for organising early childhood education and care, pre-primary and basic education at a local level. They are mainly responsible for financing these as well.

The task of the local authorities is to offer all children of compulsory school age – including those with mental or physical impairments – an opportunity to learn according to their abilities. The local authorities make decisions on allocation of funding and recruitment of personnel. They can also delegate the decision-making power to the schools.

The education providers, usually municipalities and the schools themselves, draw up their own local curricula within the framework of the national core curriculum. They are also responsible for practical teaching arrangements, and the effectiveness and quality of their education. That is to say, as long as the basic functions determined by law are carried out, the schools have the right to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements and visions ([Eurydice, Finland: Organisation and governance](#)).

4.2 Specific areas for shared responsibilities across and between central and local government

Policy development, implementation and co-ordination

Ministry (policy development), Finnish National Agency for Education (co-ordination and implementation) and education providers (implementation and local co-ordination).

Identification of needs / referral for services

Pre-primary education and compulsory schooling

Learners participating in education are entitled to sufficient direct support for growth, learning and school attendance as the need arises. Attention must be on early identification of learning barriers and difficulties. Early identification of support needs requires continuous assessment of children's growth and learning, and provision of



support must be initiated at a sufficiently early stage. This will prevent aggravation and long-term effects of problems.

Assessing support needs and offering the necessary support form an integral part of a teacher's work and all teaching situations. Support is constructed through co-operation between teachers and other experts, where required, and in interaction with learners and their parents or guardians. Special attention must be focused on learners' learning abilities and their opportunity to assume responsibility for their own learning, setting objectives for it, and its planning, implementation and assessment. General support measures are usually initiated based on teachers' observations.

Support needs may be assessed using the results of examinations and any other evaluations conducted on the learner. Support measures must form a systematic continuum. Support levels are planned individually for each learner.

Intensified support measures are initiated on the basis of a pedagogical assessment, which describes:

- the status of the learner's learning and schooling as a whole;
- general support provided for the learner and an assessment of its effects;
- the learner's learning abilities and special needs relating to learning and schooling;
- an assessment of the types of pedagogical and learning environment and learner welfare;
- other arrangements that support the learner.

The learner's teachers draw up a written pedagogical assessment. Where necessary, and especially in cases concerning problems relating to the learner's well-being and overall development, other experts are involved to help draw up the assessment. Co-operation with the learner and their parents or guardians is important in terms of determining needs, and planning and successfully implementing support measures. Any learning plan already in place for the learner as part of general support will be used when drawing up the pedagogical assessment. If the learner has a rehabilitation plan, this may also be used with permission from the parents or guardians.

Prior to deciding on special support, the education provider must prepare a pedagogical statement on the learner. For the purposes of the pedagogical statement, a body, official or employee appointed by the education provider will obtain:

- a statement on the learner's learning progress from their teachers;
- a statement on the intensified support measures provided for the learner and the learner's overall situation, prepared in multi-disciplinary learner welfare co-operation.

Based on the statements, the education provider evaluates the learner's special support needs. The combination of these two statements and the subsequent assessment is known as a pedagogical statement.

A written pedagogical statement outlines:

- the status of the learner's learning and schooling as a whole;



- intensified support provided for the learner and an assessment of its effects;
- the learner's learning abilities and special needs relating to learning and schooling;
- an assessment of the types of pedagogical, learning environment, learner welfare or other arrangements that support the learner;
- a justified assessment of whether the learner needs an individualised syllabus in one or more subjects.

Source: [European Agency, Country information for Finland, Assessment within inclusive education systems](#)

Data collection and sharing

The national evaluation system of education consists of three sections:

- learning outcomes;
- production of indicators that provide long-term information on educational trends;
- evaluation projects on selected topics (situational or thematic evaluations).

There are different national data collection methods:

Support for learning

Statistics on support for learning describe learners having received intensified or special support in comprehensive schools, part-time special education and special education in vocational education. The data are collected with an inquiry and from the KOSKI database. The data are published once a year.

[Statistics Finland](#)

The School Health Promotion (SHP) study

This monitors the well-being, health and schoolwork of Finnish students.

[School Health Promotion Study](#)

The aim of the SHP study is to strengthen the planning and evaluation of health promotion activities at school, municipal and national levels. The results are presented at local and national levels.

Vipunen – Education Statistics Finland

Vipunen is the education administration's reporting portal. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education are jointly responsible for its content.

Vipunen's statistics are based on data and registers collected by Statistics Finland, the Ministry of Culture and Education and the Finnish National Agency for Education. You can use this service to access statistics and indicators for education in a number of educational sectors, placement of students after completion, research conducted in higher education institutions, the population's educational structure and the socio-economic background of students.



Vipunen's content is arranged according to the following sectors of education:

- [All levels and sectors](#)
- [Pre-primary and basic education](#)
- [General upper secondary education](#)
- [Vocational education and training](#)
- [University of applied sciences \(UAS\) education](#)
- [University education](#)
- [Higher education and r&d activity](#)
- [Population, educational and vocational structures](#)

National data warehouse for early childhood education and in Finland – VARDA

The national data warehouse for early childhood education and care (VARDA) was introduced in 2019. The data warehouse provides high-quality data that are commensurate, up-to-date and comparable, and which can be used for planning, guiding and developing early childhood education and care at both the national and international level as well as for the statutory activities of the authorities. The data in the data warehouse can also be harnessed for scientific research purposes. Provisions on the national data warehouse are laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018).

[Final report of the Varda project](#)

[Finnish National Agency for Education – VARDA](#) (only in Finnish)

Monitoring and evaluation

Evaluation information and support for developing education

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is responsible for evaluating early childhood education and care, education and training nationally. FINEEC's evaluations cover the entire education system from early childhood education and care to higher education.

FINEEC's evaluations produce information and development recommendations for local, regional and national decision-making and development work as well as for international comparisons. The evaluation activities comprise national learning outcome assessments, thematic and system evaluations and evaluations of quality systems, including audits of higher education institutions. FINEEC also supports providers of early childhood education and care, education and training as well as higher education institutions in evaluation and quality management matters. FINEEC's evaluations are based on independence, trust, openness and interaction.

All FINEEC evaluation reports are public and available to download on the Centre's website. FINEEC informs the participants of the evaluation results and gives them feedback.

[Finnish Education Evaluation Centre \(FINEEC\)](#)



At the local level, the municipality and the educational institutions that they maintain are responsible for developing the education they provide according to local conditions. According to legislation, municipalities are responsible for accomplishing local evaluation of education. At a local/municipal level, evaluation may focus on the accessibility of education, the financial accountability of educational institutions and the realisation of the objectives of municipal policies on education and culture, as well as on the differences between various educational institutions. At an institutional level, the evaluation targets include the achievement of objectives, the completion of pedagogic and curricular reforms and the use of resources.

International evaluations

PISA assesses the learning outcome of learners aged 15 in mathematics, science and reading literacy. PISA assesses to what extent learners have acquired knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society and the variation in these skills over time. The learners participating in the assessment are chosen by random sampling.

PISA also gauges attitudes to learning and learning skills. Questionnaires to learners and schools gauge learning environments at home and at school, the learners' social background and the support they receive in learning, and learners' attitudes to school and learning.

[Ministry of Education and Culture – Finland and PISA](#)

International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) provides reliable and timely trend data on the mathematics and science achievement.

In Finland, the TIMSS study was conducted by the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture. TIMSS is co-ordinated by IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement).

In Finland, the study comprised 7,380 fourth graders from 229 schools and 5,570 eighth graders from 154 schools. TIMSS assessments are conducted with four-year intervals to measure student performance in line with the participating countries' curricula for mathematics and science. In TIMSS 2019, some countries, including Finland, opted for eTIMSS, a computerised assessment.

[TIMSS 2019 study](#)

Quality assurance and accountability

School board

The administration and management of state and private schools is regulated by the Act on the Administration of Education Provided by the State and the Private Sector (634/1998). All schools (irrespective of ownership) must have a school board with representatives of teachers, learners (over the age of 14) and other school staff.

[UNESCO, Education profiles. Finland, non-state actors in education](#)



Funding

The state and the local education providers share the financial cost for tuition and the construction of schools. The local education providers receive central government transfers for costs related to establishing and using educational institutions.

Central government transfers system for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education

The state participates in the financing of educational services by means of the central government transfers system. The central government transfers system for pre-primary education and basic education comprises the central government transfers to local governments for basic public services and the municipality of residence reimbursement to pre-primary education and basic education providers, which are co-ordinated by the Ministry of Finance, as well as central government transfers for the provision of education and culture co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The financing system applies to municipalities, private education providers and joint municipal authorities. The Ministry of Education and Culture is the public authority in charge of the financial administration of state subsidies. The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for the collection of information, the information services and customer guidance related to the central government transfers system.

Financial resources co-ordinated by the Ministry of Finance

Central government transfers to local government for basic public services are based on the municipality's population size in each age group and a basic price set per resident in each age group, as well as supplementary transfers and other extra funding based on specific conditions in the municipality. Municipality of residence reimbursements to education providers are determined on the basis of the municipality's imputed costs for pre-primary education, primary and lower secondary education separately for the following groups: age 6, ages 7 to 12, and ages 13 to 15. The Ministry of Finance decides each year on the basic sum for the municipality of residence reimbursement for each municipality separately.

Financial resources co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education and Culture

The Act on the Financing of Educational and Cultural Provision (1705/2009) has provisions on the financing of those activities in pre-primary education and comprehensive school education that do not fall within the scope of the age-group specific government transfers financed by the Ministry of Finance. Under the Basic Education Act, the Ministry of Education and Culture is in charge of financing comprehensive school education related to additional voluntary comprehensive school education, instruction preparing immigrants for comprehensive school education, pre-primary and comprehensive school education for non-compulsory school-aged learners, education provided abroad, education based on extended compulsory education, reform school education, boarding school education at comprehensive school level and flexible comprehensive school education. Financing for these is determined on the basis of the number of learners and a unit price per learner.

The funds for operating costs for tuition are disbursed directly to the education provider; in other words, to the educational institution of a local authority, joint municipal authority



or private organisation or foundation that the learners are attending. The financial resources that have been granted are not earmarked to the allocation or imputation bases; instead, the local authority or other education provider is free to decide how to allocate the funds.

[Ministry of Education and Culture – Financing of general education](#)

4.3 Formal and informal collaboration across ministries

Based on the Learner Welfare Act (2014), the National Core Curriculum and ministries (Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health) have arranged in-service education for multi-professional staff ([European Agency, Financing inclusive education systems. Country report Finland](#)).

4.4 Specific mechanisms for formal and informal collaboration that impact on inclusive education

Development of a shared vision for inclusive education

Right to Learn working group (2020–2022).

Policy development, implementation and co-ordination

Proposals based on the work of the Right to Learn working group (11/2022).

The [background is only available in Finnish](#), but the recommendations are also in English.

Identification of needs / referral for services

No information.

Data collection and sharing

No information.

Monitoring and evaluation

No information.

Quality assurance and accountability

No information.

Funding

Project funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture or Finnish National Agency for Education.



SECTION 5. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

This section provides information on the general and specific quality assurance and accountability frameworks and mechanisms informing the country's education system.

5.1 School inspection processes and structures for all forms of educational provision

In Finland, quality assurance is primarily the responsibility of education providers and the educational institutions themselves at all levels of education. The education providers have a statutory duty to evaluate the education they provide and its effectiveness and participate in external evaluations of their activities. This duty is stipulated in the respective acts for each school form from ECEC to higher education. Self-evaluation practices are decided locally. The legislation also requires that key results of evaluations must be published, but it does not provide detailed instructions on the ways that the findings should be published.

External evaluations are mainly carried out by the [Finnish Education Evaluation Centre](#) (FINEEC). It operates as a separate unit within the Finnish National Agency for Education. FINEEC carries out evaluations related to education including the operations of education providers at all levels.

There are no school inspections or a national system for teacher evaluation, and the only national standardised test is at the end of general upper secondary education. Instead, the sample-based evaluations of learning outcomes as well as thematic and system evaluations form the basis of the national evaluation system.

The main objective of these evaluations is to

- develop education and support learning;
- be part of the quality assurance processes for education;
- provide data and information for evidence-based planning, policy decisions and performance-based steering locally, regionally and nationally.

FINEEC also supports education providers and schools in the development of their own quality assurance activities. Decisions regarding directions and financing of national evaluations are taken by the Ministry of Education and Culture. FINEEC has to draw up an action plan for external educational evaluation in accordance with the guidelines and financial resources set by the Ministry of Education and Culture. It has to make proposals for the development of educational evaluation and to promote educational evaluation research and co-operation as well.

Provisions on the duties and organisation of FINEEC are laid down in Act 1295/2013 and Government decree 1317/2013 ([Eurydice, Finland: Quality assurance](#)).



5.2 Other quality assurance processes for all forms of educational provision

Early childhood and care

ECCE services are externally supervised by the Regional State Administrative Agency, the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, and the municipal decision-making body or an Officeholder. Supervision activities include providing steering and guidance and monitoring the development of operations in collaboration with providers. According to the Early Childhood Education and Care Act (540/2018), inspections are only carried out on the sites and premises of ECEC services for 'justifiable reasons'. In the case of an inspection, supervisory authorities may receive executive assistance from the police.

Private ECEC providers are required to create self-supervision plans to ensure the appropriateness of their activities as part of their quality management. The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health issues regulations on the formulation, content and supervision of self-supervision plans. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) has developed the Guidelines and Recommendations for Evaluating the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care (2019) to specifically support providers in carrying out systematic and goal-oriented self-evaluation of their activities. According to these guidelines, self-evaluation helps providers identify their existing strengths and areas of development and includes regular and systematic monitoring of their activities, parent and guardian participation, and self-evaluation structures. The purpose of this evaluation is to develop the quality of ECEC and improve the conditions for children's learning and development.

Regardless of the type of provider, ECEC services are required to adopt the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care and (for pre-primary level) the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (2014) developed by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The aim of a unified curriculum is to 'promote the equal implementation of early childhood education and care nationwide' and municipalities and private providers are instructed to use the core curriculum as a basis for the development of their local curriculum. The Finnish ECEC curriculum is based on the so-called 'educare' model, which is an integrated approach to care, education and teaching with emphasis on pedagogy and learning through play. Children who speak the official languages of Finnish, Swedish or Sámi (the language of the indigenous population of Finland) are offered education and care in their mother tongue, while children with different language and cultural backgrounds are supported in collaboration with representatives of their cultures. ECEC services (particularly private providers) may choose to follow different pedagogies (such as Steiner or Montessori), adopt a different language of instruction, or emphasise a particular physical activity or science (with some providers offering so-called 'forest' ECEC centres that operate outdoors in the natural environment).

The Early Childhood Education and Care Act (540/2018) includes sanctions in the case that providers are in breach of the Act or registration requirements, which range from fines to the provider being ordered to discontinue their operations with immediate effect ([UNESCO, Education profiles. Finland: non-state actors in education](#)).



Quality criteria to support the operation of schools

The quality criteria for basic education were issued in the autumn of 2009. The criteria aim to:

- ensure a high-quality and diverse supply of instruction;
- guarantee learners' basic educational and cultural rights, irrespective of their place of residence, native language and financial situation.

The quality criteria are used to produce local-level information about the structural and operational quality of basic education, and to inform decisions about the provision of basic education. The quality criteria determine on what grounds the activities can be analysed and how activities can serve the set aims.

Measures to promote the basic education quality criteria include government subsidies and in-service training promoting regional co-operation in quality assurance, among others. The basic education quality criteria will be updated and expanded to include quality criteria for learners' morning and afternoon activities ([European Agency, Country information for Finland, Systems of support and specialist provision](#)).

Quality indicators for special needs education

The planning, provision, evaluation, monitoring and development of special education are included in the overall development plan for education and the curriculum drawn up by each education provider. These plans are based on the relevant national core curriculum. They are carried out in co-operation with those responsible for mainstream education. In vocational education and training, the education providers' curricula define the organisation of special education and co-operation within the institution. Responsibility for arranging rehabilitation and support services related to special education rests jointly with the educational and social administrations and the health care services of each local authority.

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 learners with different backgrounds, including learners with SEN. Neither the schools nor the municipalities are accountable for the results.

The [Finnish Education Evaluation Centre](#) is a government agency which implements the assessments and co-ordinates national monitoring of learning outcomes (European Agency, [Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education – Finland Country Report](#)).

Source: [European Agency, Country information for Finland, Systems of support and specialist provision](#)

Safety measures and COVID-19

All learners are entitled to a safe learning environment, with state and private providers required to draw up plans and school rules for safeguarding learners against any violence, harassment and bullying. Moreover, all learners are entitled to free welfare services that



promote good mental and physical health. Specific provisions on learner welfare are regulated by the Learner Welfare Act (1287/2013) ([UNESCO, Education profiles, Finland: non-state actors in education](#)).

5.3 Evaluation mechanisms used to monitor outcomes at different system levels

General outcomes (academic, social, well-being, etc.) for all learners

No information.

Specific outcomes (academic, social, well-being, etc.) for learners vulnerable to exclusion

The statistics on provision, resources and costs of special needs education will be drawn upon to obtain a continuous view on the state of special needs education nationwide and to acquire comparative data on the effects of regional and municipal differences ([European Agency, Country information, Finland: Systems of support and specialist provision](#)).

Outcomes for schools (professional development, staff and personal well-being, etc.)

No information.

Outcomes for parents and families (support, participation, family well-being, etc.)

No information.

5.4 Evaluation mechanisms used to monitor the effectiveness of processes at different system levels

Effectiveness of teaching and learning processes

There are several projects to prevent the exclusion of learners by developing productive learning models and models to teach and support learners with mental illnesses ([European Agency, Country information Finland: Systems of support and specialist provision](#)).

Effectiveness of school management processes

Evaluation of the status of special education formed the basis for projects dealing with qualitative development of special education. The national project 2002–2004 to develop the quality of special education, integrating the operating systems of education in mainstream and special education and in vocational education and training; to reform the operating cultures and joint guidance of education, instruction and support services (health care and social administration, day-care and youth services) by supporting the integration of the service systems at regional and municipal levels, co-operation, evaluation and steering across administrative boundaries; to ensure that instruction and support services were organised in accordance with learners' age level and abilities, so as



to promote learners' healthy growth and development, in co-operation with the authorities responsible for implementing social and health care services.

In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a steering group to prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy for the development of special needs and inclusive education. The strategy for pre-primary and basic education was published in November 2007 and put into practice in autumn 2010. The Ministry of Education and Culture prepared the changes in legislation, and the Finnish National Board of Education prepared the changes to the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary and Basic Education (2010). The steering group also produced definitions for the key concepts.

The strategy for the development of special needs and inclusive education emphasises the importance of the wide basic education network which supports the right of every learner to attend their nearest mainstream school. The nearest mainstream school refers to a school where a learner would regularly be assigned. In that school, every learner should get sufficient and timely support to reach the goals of basic education. Inclusive education refers to the provision of education in such a manner that all learners' successful learning and development can be secured.

Inclusion calls for developing both system and operational structures. It also requires the development of an operational culture and pedagogical methodology that will promote all learners' success in their studies and their positive growth and development. When arranging education for a learner with SEN, the local school's ability to teach the learner will always be explored first. This involves assessing the resources and support measures required by the school in order to successfully promote learning. If the assessment indicates that the learner's support needs are particularly demanding, to an extent that it is impossible to provide education at the nearest school, education must be provided where it will benefit the learner.

The strategy for developing special needs and inclusive education proposed a change in practice to focus on much earlier support and prevention. This intensified support should be adopted as the primary form of support before a decision on special support is made. According to the strategy, this would reduce the number of learners in special needs education. The intensified support would promote learning and growth and prevent the accumulation of problems relating to learning, social interaction or development.

When the decision of special needs education is made, it should have stronger status. Furthermore, in addition to medical expertise, the role of pedagogical expertise and planning should be strengthened. The strategy suggested that making early childhood education part of the education administration system would enable children with special needs to proceed more flexibly and safely from early childhood to pre-primary and onwards to basic education ([European Agency, Country information for Finland, Systems of support and specialist provision](#)).

Effectiveness of teacher professional development processes

Recent studies show that the new competence requirements arising from societal change emphasise teachers' ability to meet learners, parents and colleagues as co-operative partners. Teachers cannot cope on their own under the pressures set by increasing requirements. A well-functioning multi-cultural school works as a community, whose



results depend on its ability to employ the learners' individual and special skills to benefit the common good. As a result of the increase in social problems and in the number of learners who need special attention, teachers need both pedagogical and social knowledge and skills to work together when solving problems at school. Teachers are also expected to be open to interacting with their environments. The 'teachership' of the future means the ability to teach heterogeneous groups, readiness to actively participate in discussions concerning the direction of education and society, and the will to work for development ([European Agency, Country information for Finland, Systems of support and specialist provision](#)).

See 'developing teacher training': Metsäpelto, Poikkeus, Heikkilä, et al., 2022; Saloviita, 2022.

Efficiency and effectiveness of funding mechanisms

The strategy (see above: effectiveness of school management processes) stresses the central role of teachers. Developing inclusive education requires heavy investments in teacher education. In Finland, teachers have been trusted to do their best as true education professionals and have therefore had considerable pedagogical independence in the classroom. Schools have likewise enjoyed substantial autonomy in organising their work within the framework of the national core curriculum ([European Agency, Country information for Finland, Systems of support and specialist provision](#)).

Effectiveness of (vertical) co-operation between stakeholders at different system levels

No information.

Effectiveness of (horizontal) co-operation between ministries and ministerial departments

No information.

5.5 Specific monitoring mechanisms relating to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

No information.

5.6 Specific evaluation mechanisms relating to learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

No information.

5.7 Specific accountability mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of learners vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education

No information.



SECTION 6. STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION, CO-OPERATION AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

This section provides information on the structures, mechanisms and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration and co-operation in the country.

6.1 Does the legislation and policy framework specify learner voices are used to inform the development of learning and teaching environments?

No information.

6.2 Does the legislation and policy framework ensure curriculum development processes take account of all learners and their communities?

Yes.

6.2a Description of how the legislation and policy framework around curriculum development processes take account of all learners and their communities

- The national core curriculum leaves room for local variations and therefore individual schools and teachers have a lot of freedom in designing their own curricula and instruction ([Eurydice, Finland: Overview](#)).
- Separate special education curricula were abolished. All learners follow the same curriculum, which is individualised through individual education plans. In the curriculum, the concept 'need for special support' is used when referring to special education.
- Learner welfare services are included in the curriculum, and municipalities and schools are obliged to include their services in the curriculum.
- Development of inclusion and production of models for municipality, school and learner-level planning, organisation and implementation of inclusive special needs education, are organised in co-operation with various interest groups.

Source: [European Agency, Country information Finland: Systems of support and specialist provision](#)



6.3 Does the legislation and policy framework support the active involvement of different stakeholders in ensuring inclusive learning environments?

Parents and families

Local autonomy is strong and it has positive effects. There is no inspection system. If local authorities break the law, there is no punishment. Parents can appeal on some decisions like assistant service, etc. ([European Agency, Financing inclusive education systems: Finland Country report](#)).

School-leaders/leadership teams, teachers and specialist staff

No information.

Stakeholders in the local communities

No information.

Local-level decision-/policy-makers

No information.

Non-governmental organisations, disabled people's organisations or other organisations representing vulnerable groups

Several projects are developing the virtual school for SEN, according to the national strategy. These projects include representatives from the private and public sectors, state, municipalities, universities and research centres, both in the humanities and technical areas.

([European Agency, Country information Finland: Systems of support and specialist provision](#)).

6.4 Does the legislation and policy framework ensure that curriculum development processes involve the participation and contribution of different stakeholders?

No information.

6.5 Does the legislation and policy framework support the development of learning communities in local/regional areas?

No information.



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