

Compulsory education in Finland



Photo: Liisa Takala

Compulsory education lasts ten years. It starts at the age of six and ends at the age of fifteen. Almost all schools are public, there are very few private schools in Finland. Most pupils go to a municipal school near their homes. Education from pre-primary to higher education is free in Finland.

Compulsory education starts with pre-primary education. It lasts one year and begins in the year when a child turns six. In pre-primary children develop learning-to-learn skills through play and joy.

Basic education starts at the age of seven and ends at the age of fifteen. Basic education has a single structure. It includes grades 1–9. Grades 1–6 are taught by the same class teacher in most subjects and grades 7–9 by separate subject teachers.

SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS ARE TRUSTED WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF AUTONOMY

Municipalities have a lot of autonomy and can decide independently how to arrange schooling in their area. They also decide on the use of funding. Because of the local autonomy there are variations between schools.

Also teachers enjoy a high level autonomy. They can choose the learning

methods and materials they use. Teachers participate in the decision-making of their schools.

EDUCATION IS FREE FOR THE FAMILIES

In addition to free education textbooks and other materials are free. Pupils also

get a free school meal every day. Health care services are free as well; there are school nurses and dentists in schools. In addition welfare services are free for pupils; schools have psychologists and social workers for those who need these services. If the school is not near home pupils get free school transportation.

What is so special about Finnish education?

- teaching is a very popular profession
- no inspections
- no national exams
- no teacher evaluation
- teachers feel valued by society
- short school days
- the amount of homework is low

COMPULSORY SUBJECTS AND MINIMUM NUMBER OF LESSONS ARE DECIDED NATIONALLY

There are 18 compulsory subjects during basic education. In grades 1 and 2 there are eight separate subjects. The number of subjects increases in upper grades. There is variation between schools in when individual subjects are taught.

FOCUS ON SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

All pupils have the right to individual guidance and support in learning. For example remedial instruction is a student's subjective right. Private teaching after the school day is uncommon.

Repeating a grade is not common in Finland. The focus is instead on supporting the pupils in reaching the learning goals. Only 0.3 percent of pupils repeat a grade each year.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

There are no school inspections or national exams in compulsory education. Teachers assess the pupils' learning and working skills. The primary aim is to

In basic education all children study following subjects

- mother tongue and literature (Finnish or Swedish)
- the other national language (Swedish or Finnish)
- foreign languages
- environmental studies
- health education
- religion or ethics
- history
- social studies
- mathematics
- physics
- chemistry
- biology
- geography
- physical education
- music
- visual arts
- craft
- home economics
- optional studies

support their learning and development. In lower grades the assessment is written and generally descriptive and in upper grades – at the latest in grade 8 – the assessment is numerical.

FINNISH PUPILS HAVE SHORT SCHOOL DAYS

The school year has 190 working days. The summer break is ten weeks. In addition schools have autumn, Christmas and winter breaks. Teaching time in basic education is among the lowest in the world. Finnish pupils stay in school 6 300 hours during

their 9-year basic education. It is more than 1200 hours less than the OECD average. ●

Lessons per week at different grades

grade	lessons per week
1 - 2	19
3	22
4	24
5 – 6	25
7 – 8	29
9	30



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Did you know that in Finland

- there were 540 000 pupils and 2440 basic education schools in 2016
- the average school size is 203 pupils
- the average class size is 19 pupils
- education was made compulsory 1921
- 90 % of teacher satisfied with their job