

Helsinki

School year 2026–2027

Welcome to school!

Brochure for parents and guardians
of first graders





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Welcome to school!

Your child will start first grade in school next autumn. This is a significant moment, and school staff are looking forward to meeting their new pupils.

In Helsinki, we provide all children with a safe and inspiring learning path and diverse education opportunities. Learning is about doing, trying and discovering things together. The beginning of the learning path emphasises key competences and skills, as well as social and emotional skills, which together form a robust foundation for learning.

All learners have the right to learn and receive support throughout their learning path. Support is provided early and proactively. The sense of safety and security come from caring adults who listen to the child, allowing the child to feel that schoolwork is a natural part of their everyday life. Cooperation between home and school plays an important role in this. Our goal is to raise healthy and well-learning Helsinki residents, together with you, the parents and guardians at home.

To all children starting school and their parents and guardians, we wish you a good school year 2026–2027!

To the reader

This brochure provides basic information about starting school.

For more information, visit hel.fi/welcometoschool.

You can find more information about all practical matters by contacting your child's local school.

Find all local schools and their websites at hel.fi/schoolsearch.

Important dates

17 November 2025 onwards

Schools may hold information events. See the dates and times on the schools' own web pages. Find all local schools at hel.fi/schoolsearch.

From 7 January 2026

onwards, we will send out compulsory education notes to childrens' home addresses by post. The note provides information on the start of your child's compulsory education.

12–25 January 2026

Online school enrolment at asti.hel.fi. You can enrol your child in your local school or select other options, such as weighted-curriculum and bilingual education. If you do not intend to enrol your child in a municipal school, please submit a notification about this via Asti.

21 January 2026

You can also enrol your child by visiting your local school on Wednesday 21 January 2026 at 8.00–10.00. Please bring your child's compulsory education note with you. If you have already enrolled via Asti, there is no need to visit the school.

25 January 2026

If you want to apply for a place for your child in a school other than the child's local school based on their address and mother tongue, the application requires consent from each of the child's legal guardians. The guardians must give their consent no later than 25 January 2026.

26 January 2026 onwards

If you move to Helsinki after the January enrolment period has ended, please contact the principal of your local school. You can check what your local school is based on your home address at hel.fi/schoolsearch. If you wish to apply for a place for your child in English-language or bilingual education, you can apply for vacant places during the supplementary application round starting in May.

6 March 2026

School admission decisions are sent to parents and guardians by post.

16 March–13 April 2026

Application period for after-school activities. Learn more at hel.fi/afterschoolactivities.

29 March 2026

The period of providing additional information related to arranging education via Asti ends.

Spring 2026

Schools hold orientation events for upcoming first graders Find more information on the schools' own web pages. Find all local school at hel.fi/schoolsearch.

The school term and holiday dates of comprehensive schools for the 2026–2027 school year are decided in October–November 2025 and published at hel.fi/welcometoschool.

Further information:
hel.fi/welcometoschool
hel.fi/schoolsearch



How to enrol in school

The City of Helsinki assigns each child a Finnish-language or Swedish-language local school based on the child's home address and mother tongue; Finnish or Swedish, as listed in the Finnish Population Information System. Check your child's local school in the compulsory education note sent to the child's home address by post in early January 2026. Enrol your child online or by visiting the school. You can enrol your child in school

- **online at asti.hel.fi between 12 and 25 January 2026 or**
- **by visiting the local school on Wednesday 21 January 2026 at 8.00–10.00.**

Enrol online

Enrol your child in school between 12 and 25 January 2026 at asti.hel.fi. You can enrol your child in the City of Helsinki's schools and in the programmes that the schools provide. The options are:

- Finnish-language or Swedish-language local school according to the pupil's mother tongue
- Swedish-language school instead of a Finnish-language school, or vice versa (local school with teaching in the other official language of Finland)
- weighted-curriculum in music
- English-language education
- bilingual education
- Swedish-language immersion (the programme generally starts by the age 5 or 6 in pre-primary education)
- school other than the local school based on an A1 language that cannot be studied at the local school
- school other than the local school for other reasons.

If you want to enrol your child in a school other than the local school, all the child's legal guardians are required to give their consent. The guardians must give their consent on the Asti online service no later than 25 January 2026. If the guardians are unable to give their consent via Asti, please contact the school in which you wish to enrol the child.

If you do not wish to enrol your child in education provided by the City (e.g. the child will attend a private school or home schooling), please submit a notification about this via Asti. This information is important, as the City monitors children's participation in compulsory education.



The local school is in your neighbourhood

Every child in Helsinki is automatically assigned a school place in a comprehensive school in their own neighbourhood. This is called the child's local school. Helsinki is divided into different school admission areas, which determine each a local school for every child. The local school is usually within walking distance of the child's home, but it is not always the school closest to the child's home.

As a rule, each pupil is provided with the support for learning and school attendance that they need at their local school. If the pupil's local school is not suitable for them because of their state of health or other special reason, the City might assign them a more appropriate school place elsewhere. In this case, the pupil is taught in a special educational needs class for special support or a special education school.



Applying for a school other than the local school

In Finnish-language schools, it is possible to apply for weighted-curriculum, bilingual or English-language education.

Weighted-curriculum in music

In Helsinki, 1st grade weighted-curriculum in music education is offered at Porolahti Comprehensive School. Pupils applying for weighted-curriculum education must take an aptitude test, and anyone interested can apply. More information about the aptitude tests and the exact dates can be found on Porolahti Comprehensive School web page.

Bilingual education

In bilingual education, pupils study in two languages: both in Finnish and in another language. Schools in Helsinki provide bilingual education in the following language pairs: Finnish and English, Finnish and Spanish, Finnish and Chinese, Finnish and North Sami, Finnish and Swedish, Finnish and Russian, and Finnish and Estonian. There will be no language test for 1st graders applying for bilingual education in spring 2026. Instead, if there are more applicants than available places, the pupils will be selected by lottery. Information on the schools offering bilingual education can be found on the City's website hel.fi/bilingual and the schools' own web pages.

English-language education

In English-language education, all teaching is provided in English, except in the Finnish language and literature subject. English-language education is primarily intended for people living in Helsinki temporarily. The applicant must take a language test that measures their proficiency in English. Learn more at hel.fi/english-basic-education.

Swedish-language immersion

Swedish-language immersion starts in daycare, i.e. in early childhood education or by the beginning of pre-primary education at the age of 5 or 6 at the latest. Children who have not previously participated in language immersion can also be admitted to language immersion groups if there are vacant places in the groups and the child has the required level of proficiency in Finnish and Swedish. See hel.fi/language-immersion for more information.

Applying for a school other than the local school

A pupil can also apply for a school other than their local school if there is room in a Finnish- and Swedish-language school. In this case, the parents or guardians are responsible for any costs the child's journeys between home and the school may cause. The grounds for admission can be found at hel.fi/welcometoschool.

Choosing the child's language studies

Your child starts learning their first foreign language in first grade. This language is called the A1 language. The younger the child is, the easier it will be for them to learn a new language. In Helsinki, pupils can study English, Spanish, Chinese, French, Swedish, German or Russian as their first foreign language. If your child's local school does not teach the language you wish to choose, you can apply for a place in a school that does. Please state your child's A1 language preferences when enrolling them in school via Asti. The language selections of schools can be found on the schools' own web pages. Find all local schools at hel.fi/schoolsearch.

In Swedish-language schools, the A1 language is always Finnish. Please indicate your child's Finnish language proficiency when enrolling them.

Language-themed parents' evening for new pupils' parents and guardians in Helsinki on 11 November 2025 at 17.00–18.30

How to choose the first foreign language (A1 language) for your first grader? What is Finnish as a second language instruction, mother tongue instruction or bilingual education? Join the Helsinki-wide language-themed parents' evening to learn the answers to these and many other questions about language learning, instruction and choices! The event will provide information about the language selection in Helsinki's Finnish-language schools and what to consider when making language study choices. The event will be held remotely. More information and registration: hel.fi/welcometoschool.

Mother tongue instruction

Helsinki offers studies for maintaining the pupil's mother tongue, home language or language skills obtained abroad.

The programme is available to:

- ▶ pupils whose mother tongue or home language is something other than Finnish or Swedish
- ▶ pupils whose mother tongue or home language is Swedish and who attend Finnish-language comprehensive school
- ▶ pupils whose close relatives' mother tongue or home language is Romani, Sámi or Finnish Sign Language

- ▶ pupils returning to Finland who want to participate in studies to maintain the language skills they have obtained abroad.

You can enrol your child in mother tongue instruction in Asti. The studies start in August. Your child can start either in August or January. For more information on locations, dates and travel cards, please contact your school's administrative assistant.



Which one to choose: Finnish as a first language or Finnish as a second language

All school pupils study a subject called mother tongue and literature. In these lessons, pupils study towards the goals determined in the Finnish language and literature as a first language (S1) syllabus or the Finnish/Swedish as a second language and literature (S2) syllabus.

- The S1 syllabus is usually studied by pupils who speak Finnish as their mother tongue or have near native-level proficiency in it.
- Pupils studying the S2 syllabus are in the process of developing their language skills but have not yet reached a level of proficiency required for studying the language at native level.

The child's parents or guardians decide whether the child will study the S1 or S2 syllabus. When you enrol your child in school, you are asked to make an initial choice between the S1 and S2 syllabus for your child. In the autumn, you can discuss your choice with your child's teacher. Find more information about S2 studies in comprehensive school in a brochure available at hel.fi/welcometoschool.

Preparatory education for newcomers

If your child has recently moved to Finland and does not know enough Finnish or Swedish to be able to manage everyday situations at school in the language of instruction, you can enrol them in preparatory education. The goal of the preparatory education is for the child to achieve a level of proficiency in the language of instruction that enables them to manage everyday and

teaching situations at school in the language. First and second grade pupils in preparatory education study in their own local school with other pupils. First, enrol your child in the local school via Asti. Then contact the principal of the local school and tell them that your child needs preparatory education.

Choosing the religious or ethical studies

The options for religious or ethical subjects depend on the pupil's religion. Helsinki currently teaches Evangelical Lutheran, Catholic, Orthodox, Islamic religion and Ethics. In Finnish-language comprehensive education, there are two additional options: Buddhist and Krishna religion. The pupil will study their selected religious or ethical subject for the entire duration of comprehensive school. Once selected, the subject cannot be changed. For more information about the teaching of religious and ethical subjects and applying for teaching of the pupil's own religion, contact your child's school.

- Pupil belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church: The pupil will attend Evangelic-Lutheran religion instruction. The parent or guardian cannot choose other religious or ethical subjects.
- Pupil belonging to the Orthodox Church: The parent or guardian chooses whether the pupil will attend Orthodox or Evangelic-Lutheran religion instruction.

- Pupil belonging to a religious community registered in Finland: The parent or guardian chooses whether the pupil will attend instruction in their own religion, ethics or Evangelic-Lutheran religion, or religious instruction provided by their own religious community instead of the school. If none of the options can be arranged, the pupil will attend compensatory education arranged by the school.
- Pupil not belonging to a religious community registered in Finland: The parent or guardian chooses whether the pupil will attend ethics or Evangelic-Lutheran religion instruction. The parent or guardian can also enrol the pupil in instruction in their own religion provided by the City of Helsinki if it corresponds with the pupil's upbringing and cultural background.



Practical matters

School term dates and holidays

Going to school is the pupil's job. The school timetable provides a framework for the school week. It shows the start and end times of lessons, recess and the lunch break. The lessons organised in each subject vary from day to day. Families must plan their holidays to coincide with the school holidays, as an absence reduces the amount of teaching that the pupil receives. For a special reason, the parents or guardians can apply for exemption from schoolwork for the child. In such a case, the parents or guardians must ensure that the child does all the work assigned to them and that their absence does not hinder their studies.

School supplies and equipment

The pupil will be provided with all the school supplies and equipment that they need by the school. The pupil's family are required to provide them with a school backpack and a pencil case for supplies. In addition to this, the child must have weather-appropriate equipment suitable for indoor and outdoor physical education lessons.

School meals

Pupils are provided with a free meal every school day. There are two main course options to choose from every day. The meal includes a warm main course, a salad, grated vegetables or other raw food item, a beverage, bread and bread spreads.

Swimming instruction at school

Physical education also covers swimming instruction. The pupil must bring their own swimwear and a towel. The school will provide more detailed instructions on equipment and how to use the swimming pool. Learning how to swim takes time and regular practise. It is important for the development of swimming skills that adults take their children swimming in their free time as well.

Religious events

At the start of the school year, the school informs parents and guardians about religious events held at the school. The parents and guardians decide whether their child will attend these events. Alternative activities are always provided for religious events.

School transport subsidy

If the pupil's journey from home to the local school in grade 1–6 is at least two kilometres long, the pupil will receive an HSL travel card, making their school travel by public transport free of charge. The pupil can also receive a travel card to a school other than their local school if certain conditions are met. The pupil's parent or guardian can apply for special transport if the pupil is unable to travel to and from school independently by public transport.

Insurance

The City of Helsinki has insured all pupils against accidents. The insurance does not cover the pupils' personal property. The insurance is valid at school, on journeys to and from school and during school-organised events, excursions and school camps.

Use of mobile devices

Shared ground rules on the use of mobile devices are laid down in the school rules. Comprehensive school pupils are not allowed to use phones, tablets, headphones, watch phones or smartwatches during lessons, except for learning purposes with the permission of the teacher. However, a mobile device can also be used as a learning aid or for health reasons, with the permission of a teacher or principal. The use of mobile devices during recess, transitions and lunches is also subject to issued instructions.

Morning activities

In comprehensive education, we provide morning activities at schools before lessons for pupils in first and second grade and for pupils in third and fourth grade who have been issued an administrative decision on learning support. The activities are voluntary and free of charge. You can enrol in the activities once school has started via your Wilma account. For more information, visit hel.fi/morningactivities.

After-school activities

In Helsinki, after-school activities are organised for pupils in first and second grade and for pupils who have been issued an administrative decision on learning support. After-school activities include playing and spending time together with friends, outdoor activities, exercise and small excursions in the local environment. After-school activities are subject to a fee and include a snack and insurance. More information: hel.fi/afterschoolactivities.



Helsinki



Contact us

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Up-to-date information is available at hel.fi/welcometoschool and on the schools' own web pages at hel.fi/schoolsearch.

