

Helsinki

Introduction to school

Information on comprehensive education in Helsinki for families who have moved to Finland



Welcome to school in Helsinki!

You are holding the guide 'Introduction to school' that explains the essentials of comprehensive education in Finland. This guide supports you and your child in getting started with school. The guide gives you practical information on starting school and everyday life at school.



Helsinki invests in education

At school, your child will gain knowledge and skills that will help them find their own place in society. Your child will learn to find their own strengths and interests and to work with others. Your child is cared for and listened to at school.

We want to work closely with parents at different stages of the child's learning path. In addition to the teachers, the school has a number of professionals who help and support pupils. There are also multilingual instructors at the schools of Helsinki who can help you and your family with school-related issues.

Our aim is for all children in Helsinki to receive a good education and for every child to be taken into account as an individual – without overlooking communality.

School is an important part of the lives of children, young people and families

I hope this guide gives your family useful information on schools' activities and answers to your questions. The teachers and staff of your school will be happy to tell you more.

Outi Salo
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City of Helsinki

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There is a way for everyone to go to school

Comprehensive school is a part of the lives of all children and young people living in Finland. Compulsory schooling means that the child completes comprehensive education. It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that the child completes compulsory schooling. Children and young people are to be enrolled in school immediately after coming to Finland.

A child's compulsory schooling shall start in the year during which the child turns seven. Compulsory schooling shall end when the comprehensive education syllabus has been completed or ten years after the beginning of compulsory schooling. Thus, compulsory schooling applies to those aged 7–17. Immigrants and asylum seekers residing in Finland who are of compulsory schooling age are entitled to comprehensive education. Pupils are placed in the grade corresponding with their age.

Once a child has completed comprehensive school, they will receive a leaving certificate. The certificate allows the child to apply for a place either in general upper secondary or vocational school.

Local school placement

The City of Helsinki provides each child with a placement in the family's local school. There are also private schools and state schools in Helsinki.

Preparatory education for comprehensive education

A pupil will participate in preparatory education for comprehensive education if their skills in Finnish or Swedish are not sufficient for studying in a general education group. The preparatory education lasts for 12 months, after which the pupil enters comprehensive education.

Support for learning is available

Each child learns in their own way and at their own pace. The school takes pupils' different needs for support into account. There is a way for every

child to go to school. Schools can support learning in different ways. The support may be general, intensified or special support.

Teaching in Finnish or Swedish

The City of Helsinki offers comprehensive education in Finnish and Swedish. Swedish is the other official language of Finland.

Weighted-curriculum and bilingual education

Some schools of the City of Helsinki offer weighted-curriculum or bilingual education. Weighted-curriculum education means that you can study some subjects, such as music, a little more than normally. Pupils can apply for weighted-curriculum education by registering for an aptitude test. Aptitude tests are held in January. For more information on weighted-curriculum education, contact the schools' principals or visit the web page <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/childhood-and-education/comprehensive/what-how/painotettu>.

In bilingual education, all school subjects are studied in two languages: Finnish and another language. The goal is for the student to learn both languages of instruction. In other respects, the content and objectives of the education are the same as in monolingual education. For more information on bilingual education, contact the schools' principals or visit the web page <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/childhood-and-education/comprehensive/what-how/bilingual-education>.

How to enrol your child in the first grade of school

The Education Division will post a letter to your home. This letter will contain a compulsory education note. The form will contain detailed instructions on how to enrol your child. For help with enrolling children of all ages, contact the City of Helsinki's Information Desk Services, a social worker or the school's staff.



When a child starts school

Guardians have the opportunity to meet the teacher before school starts. There may also be other school staff present at the first meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to get to know the school and learn about various practical issues. The school also organises parents' evenings before school starts. The guardian's role is to support the child's schoolgoing and attend events organised by the school. By attending parents' evenings, guardians receive information about everyday life at the school and get to know the school's staff.

School lunch and snacks

Regular eating helps pupils to stay active and focus on schoolwork and learning new things. Pupils are offered a free hot meal each school day. It is the responsibility of the guardian to ensure that the child has eaten breakfast at home before coming to school.

Travel card and special transportation

If the child's journey from home to school is more than two kilometres in grades 1–6 or more than three kilometres in grades 7–9, the guardian may apply for a travel card for the child's travel to and from school. The travel card can only be obtained by a pupil living in Helsinki to their local school or weighted-curriculum education group. Special transportation can be applied for if the child is unable to manage the journey to and from school independently due to a disability, illness or other particular difficulty.

Insurance

The City of Helsinki has insured all pupils against accidents. The insurance does not cover the pupils' personal property.

Work and holiday periods at the schools of Helsinki

The school year consists of two terms: the autumn term and the spring term. The autumn term starts in early August and ends with the Christmas holiday. The spring term starts in January and ends on the Saturday of week 22, i.e. at the turn of May and June. The longest holiday period is

during the summer. The summer holiday lasts for just over two months. The other holidays periods include an autumn break of approximately one week in October, a Christmas holiday of approximately two weeks at the turn of the year and a one-week winter break in February (week 8).

In addition to these, schools are closed on the following holidays:






6 December: Independence Day

6 January: Epiphany

In March or April: Easter. The four-day Easter break consists of the weekend and two holiday days.

1 May: May Day

The exact dates for the work and holiday periods are announced on the school websites at the start of each school year.

August	September	October	November	December	January
School starts. Welcome to school.		Autumn break, one week.		The autumn term ends. 	The Christmas holiday 
February	March	April	May	June	July
Winter break, one week (week 8).	Easter break of a few days.			Summer holiday starts. 	Summer holiday. 

Schoolwork and holidays

Going to school is a pupil's job. As a rule, family holiday trips should be taken during school holidays. At other times, you must apply for exemption from schoolwork in writing. Absence from school reduces the teaching the pupil receives. It is the responsibility of the guardian to ensure that the pupil does not get behind in their studies during their absence.

There are small breaks or recesses during each school day. During these breaks, pupils spend time in the school yard. In upper grades, pupils may also spend their breaks indoors. The teachers supervise the breaks.



Practical tips for guardians for the start of school

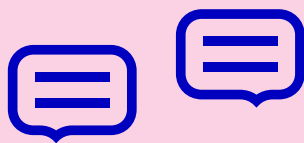
- **Prepare for the start of school.**
The child needs a school backpack, a pencil case and outdoor and indoor exercise clothing for school. Tuition, educational materials and a daily school lunch are free of charge. The pupil will receive these from school.
- **Get to know the journey to and from school.**
It's good to practice the journey to and from school with your child. It is important that the child arrives at school on time.
- **Make sure your child is dressed properly.**
Pupils are outside during breaks, so your child needs weather-appropriate outerwear for school. School uniforms are not used in Finland.
- **Make sure your child eats balanced and healthy meals throughout the day and exercises and rests sufficiently.**
- **Inform the teacher as soon as possible if your child has to be absent from school.**
A sick child cannot be sent to school. If your child needs treatment, take them to a health station.

The family's support is important to a schoolchild

- Show interest in your child's school-going. Participate in doing homework and support your child in preparing for exams, for example.
- Give your child time and be present in their daily life.
- Make sure your child feels safe and feels that they are loved. Support your child in developing their social skills.
- Use your family's own languages with your child. Encourage and help them develop their language skills diversely.
- Be a parent to your child and set limits as well.
- Make sure your child uses media moderately, safely and responsibly.
- Build good cooperation and mutual trust with the school.

The set of values of teaching and the school's ethical principles

- Finland is an equal country. The school offers everyone an equal opportunity for learning. Pupils' performance is not measured or compared with each other. School is funded with taxes.
- Parents are involved in the pupil's learning path. The guardian has the primary responsibility for the upbringing and compulsory education of the child.
- Pupils are involved and matters are negotiated with them. Children are encouraged to use their skills. Individuality is taken into account. Pupils are involved in setting their own goals, monitoring their achievement and assessing their own development.
- The development of the child is monitored comprehensively. Education professionals also identify special needs a child may have so that they can be directed to receive the best support possible.
- The school and the family counselling office, among others, provide support with questions or problems related to the development and education of children and young people or in the event of family crises.
- Physical punishment is prohibited by law.



Cooperation between school and home supports the pupil

The guardian plays an important role in supporting the child's schoolgoing. Cooperation and communication between home and school is important throughout the school path. The guardian has the primary responsibility for the upbringing and compulsory education of the child. The school's task is to support the pupil's learning and growth as a member of the school community.

Cooperation between teachers and guardians helps the child learn and grow. Guardians should always contact the school whenever they have questions.

Wilma application

Daily communication with the school takes place via the electronic Wilma application. The teachers use Wilma in all communication with parents. The principal also communicates important issues and events via Wilma. The parents report the pupil's absences to the teacher or arrange meetings with the teacher via Wilma. Parents must monitor the messages from the school daily. Wilma can be used on a computer, tablet or phone. The school provides more information about the use of the application.

Parent meetings

The teacher and the guardians always come together to discuss the matters relating to the pupil at the start of school and at a meeting organised, as a rule, at least once a year. These meetings address issues related to the pupil's learning and schoolgoing.

Parents' evenings

The purpose of parents' evenings is to bring the parents together so that they can get to know each other, the teachers and the other staff. Parents receive information about the school activities and their opportunities to participate in their children's studies and schoolgoing. Schools inform parents well in advance about their parents' evenings. In addition to these, regional parents' evenings and events in different languages may be organised.

Parents' own networks and the school board

Parents can get to know each other at events organised by the school or those of the class committee established by the parents. Schools also often have a parents' committee, which supports the activities of the entire school. Each school has a school board that includes, in addition to the school staff, representatives nominated by parents from among themselves and a pupil representative.

Information about events organised by the school can be found on the school's own website and Facebook page. Parents also often have a Facebook group for the parents of each class.



'My job includes consulting teachers and guidance counsellors, communicating with parents and talking to pupils,' says instructor Safia Abdulkarim.



Multilingual instructors support families

Multilingual instructors provide advice and guidance to pupils, families and the school. The instructors give advice on everyday questions related to school. The City of Helsinki offers guidance in Arabic, Somali, Russian, English and Finnish.

Multilingual instruction supports the schoolgoing of the child or young person and cooperation between home and school. For example, the instructors can provide guidance in the use of Wilma, give further information about the school's practices and attend the meetings between the guardians and staff organised by the school. The instructors provide the child with assistance in such matters as planning studies, finding hobbies and making friends.

One of the most important tasks of the multilingual instructors is to support the cooperation between home and school. Cooperation becomes easier when you have the opportunity to use your mother tongue for sorting out school matters and sharing information. This also ensures that parents receive and understand the necessary information about school. The multilingual instructor also strengthens the language and culture skills of other school staff.



Preparatory education for comprehensive education

Preparatory education for comprehensive education is intended for children and young people aged 6–17 who do not have sufficient language skills to study in Finnish or Swedish. The preparatory education is intended for those who have just moved to Finland. If necessary, the education can also be offered to those who were born in Finland or have immigrated to the country at under school age. Pupils have the right to attend preparatory education for one calendar year.

The purpose of preparatory education is to strengthen the pupil's knowledge of Finnish or Swedish and to develop their study skills for the transition to comprehensive education. In Finnish-language schools, the pupil's knowledge of Finnish is strengthened, and in Swedish-language schools, the knowledge of Swedish is strengthened. The lessons will introduce

the pupils to the core concepts, working methods and tools of different subjects. The pupil has the opportunity to use all the languages they know to support their learning. Preparatory education supports integration into Finnish society.

Each pupil receives their own individual education plan that defines their personal goals. The starting points are the pupil's knowledge of Finnish or Swedish, level of knowledge and schooling history.

After completing the preparatory education, the pupil moves on to comprehensive education in their local school, where they receive the support they need with learning.

Preparatory education for comprehensive education for children aged 6–8

For pupils aged 6, preparatory education is provided in a preschool group in the day care centre. Preparatory education for pupils aged 7–8 is provided in the local school in connection with comprehensive education. So the pupil studies in the same group as the Finnish or Swedish speakers. A pupil in preparatory education receives regular instruction in the Finnish or Swedish language.

Preparatory education for comprehensive education in separate groups

For pupils aged 9–17, preparatory education is usually organised in separate groups. During the preparatory year, each pupil also regularly attends the comprehensive education lessons of Finnish or Swedish-speaking pupils of the same age.

Enrolling in education

Guardians must enrol their child in school immediately after entering the country. Enrolment in preparatory education is done using the designated form. Children aged 7–8 enrol in their local school. Not all schools have preparatory education groups for those aged 9–16. The pupil is directed to the nearest group that has room and good transport connections from home.

For help with enrolment in preparatory education, contact the City of Helsinki's Information Desk Services, a social worker or the school's staff.

Versatile language skills are important



Proficiency in the language of instruction is the key to the pupil's learning. The development of Finnish or Swedish language skills continues throughout comprehensive education and beyond. It is also important to maintain and continually develop the pupil's skills in their own language, which creates the basis for all learning, including the learning of new languages. Schools in Helsinki offer a wide range of language studies, some of which are compulsory and some optional. Helsinki also offers comprehensive education in Swedish.

Finnish or Swedish skills develop with studies

Multilingual pupils' studies and Finnish or Swedish language learning is supported at school in many ways according to pupil needs. There are two Finnish syllabuses for the subject of Mother tongue and literature: Finnish language and literature and Finnish as a second language and literature (S2). The syllabuses have slightly different objectives. A multilingual pupil can study Finnish as a second language for as long as their language skills are deficient in some area. Areas of language skills include speech comprehension, speaking, text comprehension and writing.

In Swedish-language teaching, there is the option of studying the syllabus Swedish as a second language and literature (S2).

Multilingualism should be strengthened at home and school

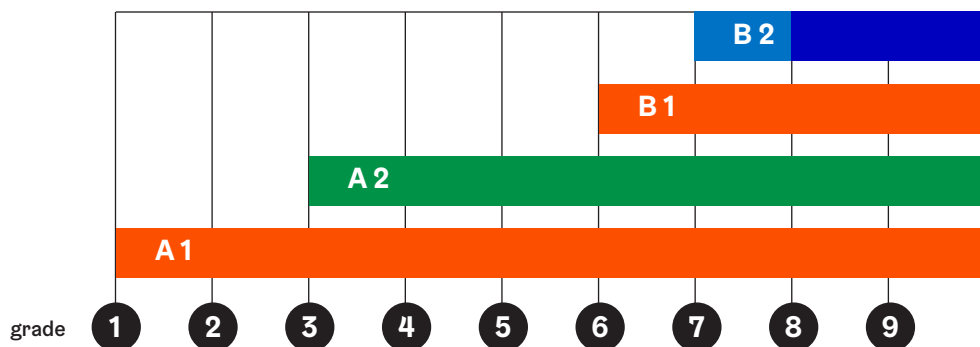
In Helsinki, mother tongue studies are offered in many languages. Participation in the mother tongue studies is optional; however, once the pupil has enrolled in the studies, they are required to attend regularly. Groups are formed based on enrolment. Enrolment in the studies can be done in connection with school enrolment or with a separate form. Information on the enrolment, schedules and locations of mother tongue studies is provided by the schools.

The pupil's skills in their mother tongue provide the basis for learning other languages and for other learning at school. Therefore, it is important to also speak, hear and use one's mother tongue in a variety of ways at home and read literature and various texts in the language.

Language teaching begins in 1st grade

The schools in Helsinki offer a wide range of language studies. All pupils start studies in a foreign language in the 1st grade. Studies in the second compulsory language start in the 6th grade.

In addition to these, pupils have the opportunity to start an A2 language as an optional subject in the 3rd grade or a B2 language in the 8th grade. Thus, a student can choose to study a total of four languages in addition to Finnish or Swedish and their mother tongue. Schools' language selection varies from one school to another. The language selection varies from school to school, and there may be changes in the language selection.



Every pupil chooses one language.

Not all languages are available in every school. The schools' language selection can be found on each school's website.

A 1 English Spanish Chinese Northern Sami French Swedish German Russian Estonian	A 2 English Spanish Chinese French Swedish German Russian	B 1 English Swedish	B 2 Spanish Italian Chinese Latin French German Russian
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Finnish or Swedish as a second language

Pupils are often advised to choose the syllabus Finnish or Swedish as a second language and literature (S2) if their mother tongue is a language other than Finnish or Swedish or they have a multilingual background. The recommendation is always supported by a comprehensive mapping of the pupil's language skills. S2 studies can take place either in a separate S2 group or together with the Finnish or Swedish language and literature group.

The objectives of the syllabuses have much in common, but S2 studies also take Finnish or Swedish into account as a tool for other learning. The studies are based on the pupil's learning needs and the stage of language learning. The choice of syllabus is made by the parents based on the teachers' recommendation. In Swedish-language teaching, pupils study Swedish as a second language and literature.

Language skills are wealth. Studies have shown that multilingualism is beneficial to a child's performance in school. Therefore, it is important that pupils whose mother tongue is a language other than Finnish or Swedish study not only S2 but also their mother tongue. Studying one's own mother tongue also supports the learning of Finnish or Swedish.

'S2 studies do not mean forgetting one's own language – on the contrary. At best, the pupil achieves a high level of proficiency in both languages: Finnish or Swedish and their mother tongue. We always encourage pupils to study their mother tongue at school,' says Elli Saari, a teacher of Finnish as a second language.

Reading effectively develops language skills

It takes several years to learn a new language. Language skills develop effectively through reading. In S2 classes, children read different texts and are invited to read literature by exploring different books. 'I hold book clubs for my pupils. Many pupils get excited about reading when they find that they can read a whole book,' says Elli Saari.



S2 teacher Elli Saari works at Kontula lower stage comprehensive school.

‘The pupils choose the book they want to read themselves. No exams are held on the books, but the pupils get to discuss what they have read with other readers of the same book during the classes. This helps with understanding the text. The pupils have enjoyed the book clubs and eagerly await them.’

Diverse use of language helps in achieving good language skills. Watching and listening to films, drama and various educational programmes improves language skills. The pupils make videos and presentations. Some S2 classes are also used to study the vocabulary and language of other subjects, such as general studies, which supports learning.

Pupils are happy to come to S2 class

‘Pupils are happy and excited to come to S2 class. It is rewarding for a teacher to see the joy of learning in the pupil. That is when you feel like you have succeeded as a teacher. Although the pupils have different levels of language skills, they all share a multilingual background and the same goal: learning a language. When studying in groups, pupils usually know how to support each other. Friends also help with language learning.’



Teaching is based on the curriculum

During the first years of school, the pupil learns important basic knowledge and skills and learns to take care of matters related to school. They learn to function in a group and make friends. As the school years progress, the responsibility for schoolwork grows, independent study increases and the thinking skills that are important to learning develop. Teachers support pupils' growth into active agents.

In grades 1–6, the pupil has a class teacher who teaches them a variety of subjects. The class teacher also acts as a builder of class community and inspires learning. The pupil usually has other teachers as well.

In grades 7–9, the student has several teachers, as each subject has its own teacher. In these grades, a class teacher is a teacher who monitors matters related to the schooling of the pupils in their class and keeps in touch with guardians. The class teacher meets with their class during designated classes. They also usually teach a subject to the pupils of their class.

The curriculum guides schoolwork

The schools of the City of Helsinki have a common curriculum based on the national core curriculum. This curriculum outlines the basics of school education, such as its objectives, values and working methods. In addition to this, each school has its own curriculum that details how people act and learn at the school. The common curriculum of Helsinki and the detailed curricula of the schools are available in Finnish and Swedish at ops.edu.hel.fi.

The school teaches pupils to act systematically and on a long-term basis. They practise skills that are important over the course of one's life and in everyday life. Practising the skills of expression and constructive interaction is considered important. Information and communications technology is utilised in all learning. The studies spread out to the immediate surroundings of the school and to the whole city.

Each pupil studies at least two long-term, cross-subject and phenomenon-based entities during each school year. Phenomenon-based studies are studies where pupils examine real-world phenomena across school subjects. Pupils are encouraged to discuss, enquire and question things.

Assessment of pupils' learning and skills

In each subject, the assessment of learning is based on the objectives and descriptions of good learning achievements defined in the curriculum. National assessment criteria are used in the final assessment. At the end of each school year, the pupil receives an annual report. The report assesses, verbally or numerically, the pupil's achievement of their objectives in different subjects.

Assessment of pupils' learning and skills

The assessment of learning is based on the objectives and descriptions of good learning achievements defined in the curriculum. The learning, work and behaviour of a pupil are evaluated comprehensively both during the school year and at the end of it. The most important part of the assessment is the continuous feedback the pupil receives on their learning during the school days.

The purpose of the assessment is to

- guide and support the learning stages,
- strengthen the pupil's confidence in their own abilities and
- develop the pupil's ability to self-evaluate.

Assessment during the school year

The pupil receives evaluative feedback during the school year as a part of teaching and schoolwork. The feedback helps the pupil understand what the objectives of learning are. The purpose of the assessment is to help the pupil realise how they can influence their own learning and progress.

Many different methods are used to document what is being learned. This makes the different stages of learning visible to the pupil and the teacher, helping to see how the learning progresses in accordance with the objectives. The forms of documentation include learning diaries, photos, videos, drawings, maps and paintings, for example. These outputs, as well as self-assessments and teacher feedback, are collected in a portfolio, which is used to support the assessment.





Assessment at the end of the school year

Pupils receive an annual report at the end of the school year. The report assesses, verbally or numerically, the pupil's achievement of their objectives in different subjects. Pupils are not compared with each other.

- The reports for grades 1 and 2 exclusively use verbal assessment, which focuses on the pupil's progress and general studying and working skills.
- In grades 3–7, the assessments can be verbal, numerical or a combination of both.
- In grades 8–9, assessments are always numerical.

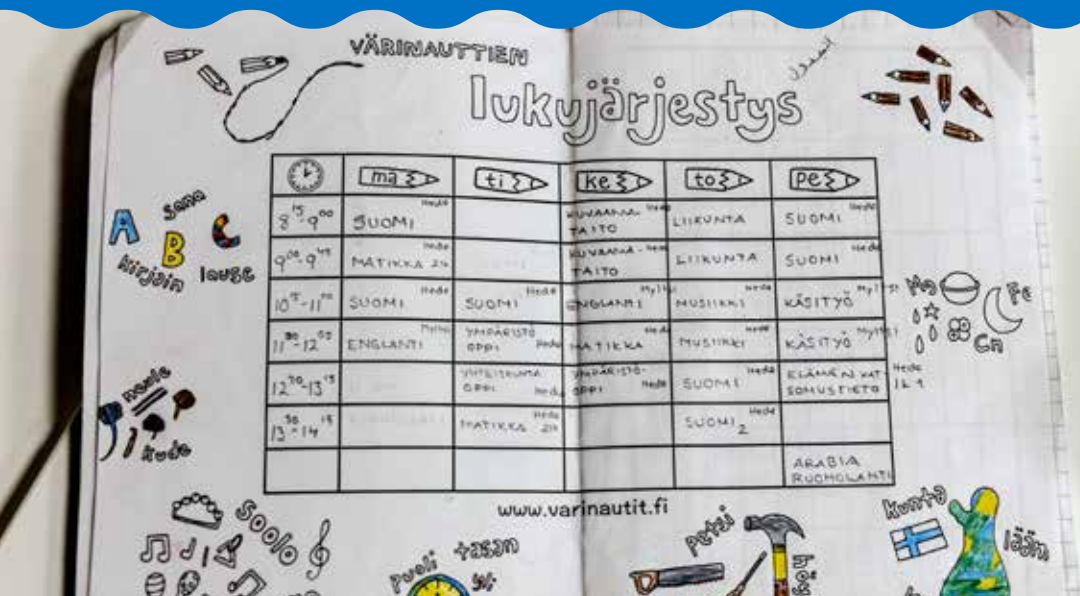
The assessment is going to undergo a nationwide change, which will be decided on by the Finnish National Board of Education in spring 2020. The change may affect the practices of verbal and numerical assessment.

Final assessment

At the end of comprehensive school, the pupil receives a final assessment. The final assessment is based on the skills demonstrated in grades 7–9 in relation to the objectives of the subject. National assessment criteria are used in the assessment.

Interaction

Good assessment is interaction between teachers and pupils in a positive atmosphere. During the school year, the pupil, teacher and parents discuss the pupil's learning. The guardians' confidence in the pupil's abilities positively influences the pupil's image of themselves as a learner.



The subjects studied in grades 1–6 are

- mother tongue and literature
- second national language, i.e. Swedish or Finnish
- foreign languages
- mathematics
- environmental studies
- religion
- ethics
- history
- social studies
- music
- visual arts
- crafts
- physical education.

Swimming education is part of physical education

Pupils in grades 1–5 shall participate in swimming education. Swimming skills are a part of physical education at school. The teacher evaluates swimming skills as a part of physical education. Pupils go swimming four times a year. The goal is for pupils to be able to swim at the end of comprehensive school.

The timetable guides the school day

Pupils study at school according to a timetable. The timetable shows the subjects being studied on different days of the week and the starting and ending times of the school days.





Khulood is in the 4th grade of comprehensive school

Khulood is an 11-year-old pupil at Lauttasaari Comprehensive School, lower stage. She has lived in Finland for two years. She attended preparatory education before coming to Lauttasaari Comprehensive School, lower stage. Khulood's mother tongue is Arabic. Her family includes her parents and three younger siblings.

'I live close to school and come to school on foot. I often walk to school with my sister. She is in class 3A at this school. I am in class 4D.' Khulood says she studies Finnish as a second language. Her mother tongue classes are held once a week in Ruoholahti, where Khulood goes on Fridays after other lessons.

'I like crafts. I made myself a pencil case out of wood there,' Khulood says. 'After school, I play football with my dad and sisters.'

Morning and afternoon activities for school children

Children can participate in morning activities before classes and afternoon activities after classes. Many pupils in the 1st and 2nd grades come to school before the start of the school day or stay after school to play, engage in their hobbies or do homework. The morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren provide stimulating and safe activities for children outside the school day.

The morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren are intended for the pupils of the 1st and 2nd grades and the pupils of other grades who need special support.

Morning activities at schools

Morning activities for comprehensive school pupils are organised at the City's comprehensive schools or playgrounds near schools. Participation in morning activities is voluntary and free of charge. Participating children are not served a separate breakfast, but can bring their own meals to eat during the activities.



Enrol in morning activities via Wilma.

More information on morning and afternoon activities can be found at <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/childhood-and-education/comprehensive/morning-afternoon>.

Participation in morning activities does not require a separate decision, simply enrolling is enough. Your school will provide you with more information on the arrangement of morning activities.

Afternoon activities after school

The afternoon activities for comprehensive school pupils are held in schools or at facilities close to them. In the afternoon activities, instructors take care of the children's activities and safety during the afternoon. Children have the opportunity to play, do their homework, exercise, play games, go on excursions and meet their friends. Joint activities are organised both indoors and outdoors. Children receive a snack during afternoon activities.

Afternoon activities are subject to a fee, but pupils may be eligible for lower fees based on their parents' income.

Playgrounds also host afternoon activities for schoolchildren. These activities are free of charge. Children can sign up for a snack subject to a fee at the playground or bring their own snack. You may receive an exemption from the snack fee.

More information on the morning and afternoon activities and other club and hobby activities at the schools can be found in Finnish on the school websites under 'Meidän koulu.'



Studies in grades 7–9

The final grades of comprehensive education are a significant time of growth for a young person. The transition to subject teaching often involves new groups, new friends and new teachers. The young person needs encouragement, support and guidance to complete the comprehensive education syllabus and find a suitable place for further study. The young person still needs the support of their parents.

In Helsinki, a large number of pupils study at a combined comprehensive school. In this case, the pupil gets to stay in their familiar school when moving to the 7th grade. If the pupil's school has only had grades 1–6, they have the right to attend their local school for the 7th grade.

Subject teachers, class teacher and guidance counsellor

Each subject is taught by a subject teacher who has specialised in the field. A class teacher is a teacher who keeps in touch with the guardians of a particular group of students. The guidance counsellor tells pupils about, guides and assists pupils in making plans for further studies.

Weekly school hours

Pupils in grades 7–9 have at least 30 hours of teaching a week.

New subjects and periodic studies

In grades 7–9, pupils study new subjects:

- biology
- geography
- physics
- chemistry
- home economics
- health education
- guidance counselling.





The pupils' studies also include elective studies. More information on these is available at the school.

In most schools, studies are divided into periods of five weeks, for example, with the timetable changing every five weeks. The different periods may include studies of different subjects.

Mohammad and Ibrahim are in the 9th grade of comprehensive school

Mohammad moved from Iraq to Finland two years ago. He went to preparatory education and is now in the ninth grade at Jakomäki Comprehensive School. Ibrahim, who moved from Syria to Finland, is also in the same grade. He also attended preparatory education and then the 8th grade in Jakomäki.

'I attended school in Syria for seven years before moving to Finland. I am now 16 years old. School was really hard in the beginning, as I didn't know the language yet. Now it's easier,' Mohammad says. 'My favourite subject at school is maths. I also like Swedish.'

Mohammad, Ibrahim and their Arabic-speaking instructor Kamal Khafif (in the middle).



'I am 16 as well. I came to Finland in 2017 and first lived in Pieksämäki. I went to preparatory class in Myllypuro, and now I'm in the same class as Mohammad,' Ibrahim says.

The boys explain that the school culture in Finland is quite different from that of their home countries. The authority of the teacher back home is absolute: 'There we had to do as the teacher says. The discipline was also strict – the word of the teacher couldn't be questioned. Here in Finland, the pupil can express their opinion and they are listened to. In disputes, we can use peer mediation at school. It allows for the parties themselves to find a solution for the situation.'

The boys met at school and are now good friends. Both study their own mother tongue at their own school. The studies in their own religion are also organised at Jakomäki Comprehensive School.



Guidance counsellors assist in the planning of further studies

There are many options for young people after comprehensive school. It is a good idea for the pupil and their guardian to search for information on areas of interest during the final grades of comprehensive school. The pupil needs help and encouragement from their family and inner circle.

The role of the guidance counsellor is to help pupils see their own strengths and the path forward. 'Our starting point is always the pupil's own needs. Some have clear hopes for the future at an early stage. Many consider different options,' says **Anna-Leena Tallskog**, who works as a guidance counsellor at Käpylä Comprehensive School. 'Vocational education is one option. Education provides a good path to working life.'

'It is advisable for the pupil to consult their own guidance counsellor in all matters concerning further education. The guidance counsellor will be able to help with any questions and problems. The guidance counsellor helps the young person find their own learning path,' says **Anne-Mari Kortelainen**, guidance counsellor at Yhtenäiskoulu.

Schools organise information events and parents' evenings regarding the joint application system for general upper secondary and vocational education.

You can also find information on the different options at [Studyinfo.fi](https://www.studyinfo.fi).

Guidance counsellors
Anne-Mari Kortelainen
and Anna-Leena Tallskog.





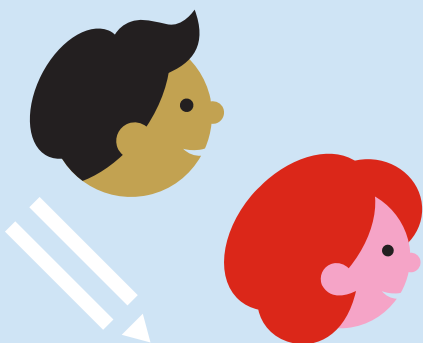
Religion and ethics

School includes studies in religion or ethics. These studies include the subjects of ethics and the pupil's own religion. These subjects are taught in accordance with the national core curriculum. The teaching of religion and ethics is politically neutral and religiously non-denominational. For more detailed information on the subjects, see the curriculum of the City of Helsinki: <https://ops.edu.hel.fi/ops/#oppiaineet> (in Finnish and Swedish).

Objectives of religious education

The purpose of religious education is to provide the pupil with a broad general knowledge of religion and beliefs. In addition to studying their own religion, the pupils learn about different religions and beliefs in the world. The studies provide a wealth of information about religions and help pupils to understand the discussion on them. Pupils are encouraged to examine religions and beliefs from different perspectives.

The studies are not religious practice. However, learning about religion involves learning about the forms and customs of religious practice. For example, the studies may include a study visit to see a religious building or observe a religious ceremony without taking part in it.



Homes are responsible for religious or non-religious upbringing. The purpose of religious education in school is educational.

The teaching of religion at school is a school subject. It is not religious practice.

Objectives of ethics studies

The purpose of ethics studies is to develop the pupils' capacity to grow into independent, tolerant, responsible and discerning members of their community. A core purpose of the studies is to promote the pupils' ability to seek a good life. This is pursued in the studies through skills in critical thinking and activity. The objective is full democratic citizenship in a globalising and rapidly changing world.

Religious and ethics education in school

In accordance with the Basic Education Act, each pupil is directed to study ethics or their own religion. The choice of religious or ethics subject is permanent.

- Members of an Evangelical Lutheran community always participate in the teaching of their religion.
- Members of an Orthodox community either participate in Orthodox studies or study with the majority.
- In Helsinki, studies of the pupil's own religion are also offered to members of other religious communities. Guardians may request these studies using the designated form available in Finnish.

hel.fi/static/liitteet-2019/KasKo/lomakkeet/oman-uskonnon-opetus.pdf

For more information about the religions taught, contact the school.


- Pupils who are not members of any religious community study ethics.



Student welfare supports the wellbeing and health of pupils

Student welfare services support pupils' growth and development and help create optimal conditions for learning. The aim is to render school a safe and pleasant experience for pupils, who should receive the necessary guidance and support when faced with challenging situations. In addition to this, pupils have a statutory right to individual student welfare services.

All of Helsinki's comprehensive schools provide school health care, welfare officer and psychologist services. Schools are served by communal student welfare teams. These multi-professional teams can include the principal, a school nurse and school doctor, a welfare officer, psychologist,



a special needs teacher, a guidance counsellor and, when needed, the class teacher. The teams work to promote the wellbeing of the school community and seek solutions to assist pupils in need of support. The pupils' affairs are handled confidentially in cooperation with the pupil and their family. If necessary, the family may be directed to support services outside of the school.

School health care

School health care includes school nurses and doctors. The school nurses carry out annual health checks for the pupils. In the first, fifth and eighth grades, pupils undergo an extensive health check, where the wellbeing of the whole family is assessed. In the health checks, efforts are made to identify the children and young people in need of support. The necessary support is provided in cooperation with the families.

Welfare officer

The welfare officer provides support, guidance and expert help to the pupil and their inner circle. The school welfare officer is an expert in social services. They can be contacted when a child or young person has problems with school or friends or when changes in their life situation affect their schoolwork.

The work of the welfare officer involves, among other things, solving issues with behaviour, social relations, family or emotions and providing support in cooperation with the pupils, guardians and school staff.

Psychologist

The school psychologist helps pupils with learning difficulties, attention issues, emotional problems and personal crises. The school psychologist provides guidance and consultation and carries out psychological evaluations when necessary.

The pupil's affairs are always handled confidentially in a manner agreed upon with the pupil and their parents.

Parents can contact the student welfare staff directly if they wish. Their contact details are available on the schools' websites.





Support for learning and schoolgoing

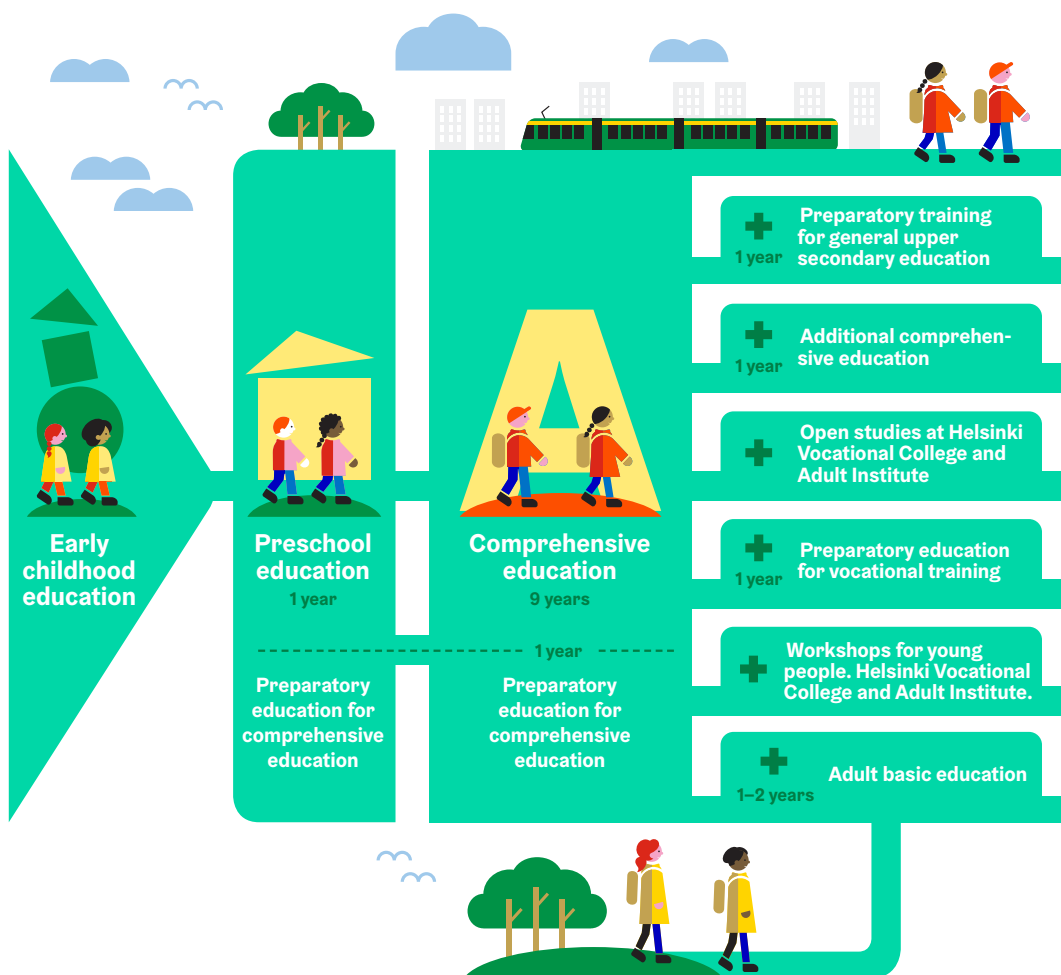
A child may need support at school to develop their skills and knowhow as well as possible. The home's role and cooperation with the school in supporting the child's learning and growth is important. The school offers a wide range of support for learning and schoolgoing.

Support measures may include, for example,

- diverse and varied tasks,
- studying in flexible teaching groups,
- remedial teaching,
- part-time special needs education and
- student welfare services.

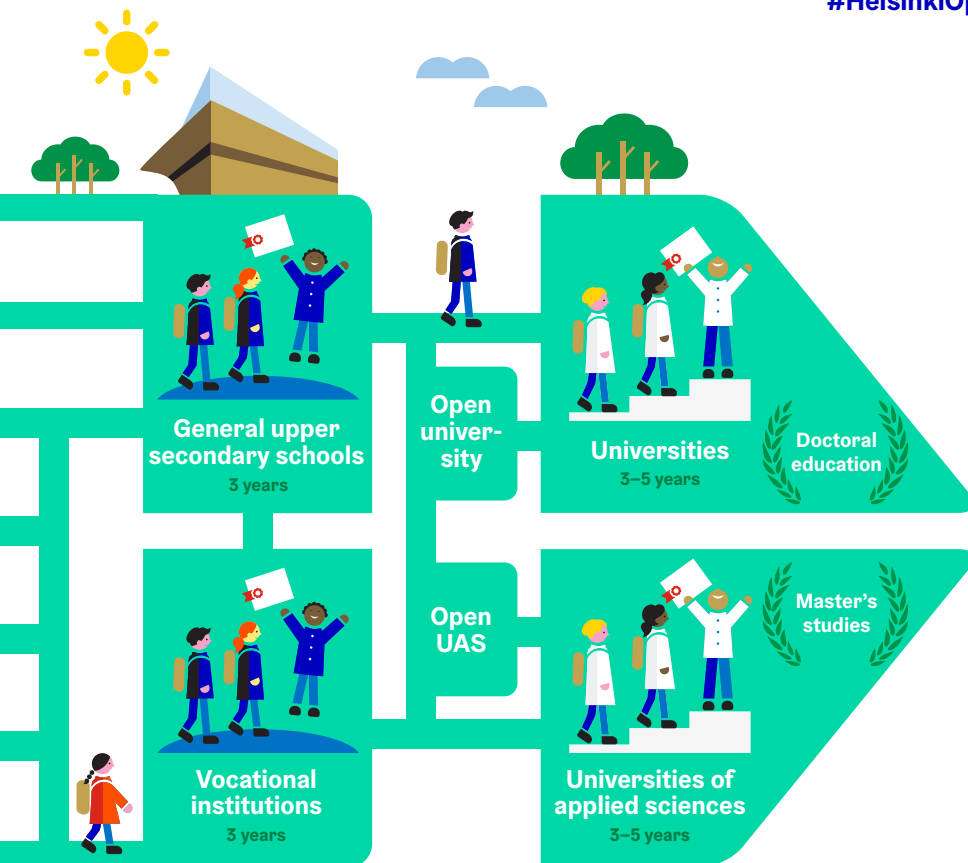
Parents can contact the teacher immediately if concerns arise regarding the pupil's learning. The pupil's learning progress is monitored together with the guardian. A child is entitled to intensified support if they need regular support and several different support services for their learning and schoolgoing. Intensified support is provided in the pupil's own class as a part of the teaching. The child's learning and schoolgoing, as well as the adequacy of the support measures, are assessed in cooperation with the guardians. If the child needs more support, special support may be needed. Special support can be provided in the local school in the pupil's own class, in a special needs class or in a special needs school.

Learning paths in Helsinki



Helsinki

www.hel.fi/en
#HelsinkiOppii



Lifelong learning:
adult education
centres, etc.

Options for after comprehensive school



Pupils may apply for vocational studies or general upper secondary education after comprehensive school. There are also other options, such as preparatory training. Studies after comprehensive school are called upper secondary studies.

Upper secondary education leads to a matriculation examination or a basic vocational degree. After these studies, the student has the right to apply for further education at a university or a university of applied sciences. A basic vocational degree also gives a direct professional qualification for the profession studied.

Vocational education

Vocational education is provided at vocational institutions. The qualifications of vocational education include basic vocational degrees, vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. A basic vocational degree provides the basic skills required in a profession. Vocational and specialist vocational qualifications deepen professional skills at different stages of the career. Vocational education is carried out in accordance with a personal competence development plan (HOKS). Some of the learning takes place in working life. After completing the basic vocational degree, the student can either directly move on to work or continue their studies at a university or a university of applied sciences.

You can apply to vocational institutions throughout the year. The joint application period is intended for those who are about to complete comprehensive school or the matriculation examination and any others who have not completed an upper secondary level qualification. Everyone else may apply in the continuous application process.

The guidance counsellor provides information on the education options and applying. Information can also be found at [Studyinfo.fi](https://www.studyinfo.fi) and the educational institutions that provide the qualifications.



General upper secondary education

As a rule, students in general upper secondary school study the same subjects as in comprehensive education. Each student studies according to their personal study plan. At the end of general upper secondary education, students take a matriculation examination. The students can continue their studies at a university or a university of applied sciences.

Students are selected for general upper secondary school based on the average grade of theoretical subjects in the comprehensive school leaving certificate.

Upper secondary schools are applied to via the [Studyinfo.fi](https://studyinfo.fi) service during the joint application period.

Combination of general upper secondary and vocational studies: the double degree

One alternative to general upper secondary and vocational studies is the double degree, whereupon the student completes a basic vocational degree, general upper secondary studies and the matriculation examination. The main institution of a double degree student is the vocational institution, where they spend most of their time studying for a basic vocational degree.

Preparatory training helps pupils move forward

If a young person completing comprehensive education is not yet sufficiently prepared to move on to upper secondary studies, they may apply for preparatory training for general upper secondary education or preparatory education for vocational training.

Preparatory training for general upper secondary education, LUVÄ

Preparatory training for general upper secondary education provides the skills needed to apply for general upper secondary education. The training is intended for immigrants and students with a native language other than Finnish who wish to pursue general upper secondary education and the matriculation examination but whose language skills are still insufficient for general upper secondary studies.


The course includes the Finnish and English language studies needed in general upper secondary school, social and cultural studies, studies in mathematics and natural sciences, and strengthening of studying capabilities.

Preparatory education for vocational training, VALMA

The preparatory training course gives the participants the skills they need to apply for vocational studies. Valma is aimed at those who have finished comprehensive school and do not yet know what they want to study and want to improve their study skills before moving on to upper secondary studies.

Valma is also the right choice for adults who want to improve their readiness to study in upper secondary education. Valma is suitable for immigrants or those planning a career change, for example.

In Valma, you follow an individual study plan. Students apply to Valma via the Studyinfo web service.

An illustration of two children, a boy and a girl, standing on a yellow wavy background. The boy is on the left, wearing a blue jacket and pants, with his arms raised in celebration. The girl is on the right, wearing a light blue jacket and pants, also with her arms raised. Above them are two white diplomas with red ribbons, a bright yellow sun, and two blue birds flying in the sky.

More information on training and applying is available through the [Studyinfo.fi](https://studyinfo.fi) service.

Further education opportunities are discussed with guidance counsellors and teachers in grades 7 and 9.

Further information and links for teaching and education

Service point of the Education Division

Telephone +358 (0)9 310 44986 on weekdays at 10am–12 noon and 1–3pm.

Visiting address: Töysänpäätie 2D, 00510 Helsinki

Postal address: PO Box 51300, 00099 City of Helsinki

Switchboard: +358 (0)9 310 8600 on weekdays at 8am–4pm.

edu.hel.fi/en

Information on teaching and education in Helsinki

servicemap.hel.fi/search?q=education

All services related to education on a map of Helsinki

hel.fi/peruskoulut/fi

The comprehensive schools in Helsinki in alphabetical order (in Finnish)

Your own school's website and Facebook page

The sites include information on the school's curriculum, language selection, work and holiday periods, information events, morning and afternoon activities and much more.

OPS.edu.hel.fi

City of Helsinki curriculum (in Finnish and Swedish)

studyinfo.fi

Information on the educational institutions and universities in Finland

Publisher: City of Helsinki Education Division

Photos: Jefunne Gimpel

The information in this guide was revised in December 2019.

We reserve the right to make changes.

Up-to-date information:

hel.fi/maahanmuuttajat/en/education/development-plan-for-immigrant-education/

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