Welcome to school!
A guide for first-graders’ guardians
Welcome to school!

Your child will start school in the first grade next autumn. Their learning path started from early childhood education and pre-primary education and will continue from comprehensive school to upper secondary education. We want to provide all children with a safe and inspiring learning path and diverse education opportunities.

Helsinki invests in education. We want all children to receive high-quality teaching, and every child should be seen as an individual, but also as a member of the school community. There is a wide variety of support networks available for all first-graders and for children who need special support in particular. The teaching at school emphasises the joy of learning and doing things together, trying out and discovering new things. Learning is based on real-life phenomena, and every pupil studies at least two phenomenon-based long-term units over the course of the year.

Caring about the children and listening to them makes them feel safe at school. Children should feel that schoolwork is a natural part of their everyday life, which is why co-operation between home and school is important. Comprehensive schools hold parents’ evenings for future first- graders’ families. Attending these events is recommended, and you can get in touch with the school even before your child starts there.

Studies in an A1 language, meaning the first foreign or second national language, start in the first grade, and the studied language is chosen when you enrol your child to school. The development of language skills begins in early childhood, and joy, playfulness and creativity play a significant role in learning in the first grade. At the beginning, learning emphasises the development of the children’s oral language skills, as well as familiarising the children with the language and culture.

I wish all new schoolchildren and their families a good and safe school year 2021-2022!

Outi Salo
Head of Basic Education
Education Division
City of Helsinki
More information can be found online at

**hel.fi/welcometoschool**
- including enrolment instructions, forms and frequently asked questions.

**palvelukartta.hel.fi/en/**
- Find all education services and their locations in Helsinki using the Service Map.

**hel.fi/peruskoulut/en**
- All schools in Helsinki alphabetically and by education level.

**Your local school’s website**
School’s curriculum, language selection, and school term dates and holidays etc.

**Forms**
- All necessary forms can be found at **hel.fi/welcometoschool**

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### Important dates 2020–2021

**16 November 2020–21 January 2021**
Schools may hold information events for guardians. Due to the coronavirus, the events will be held primarily as online events. In exceptional cases, schools may hold information events in the school premises, following the National Institute for Health and Welfare’s safety and hygiene instructions, as well as instructions regarding gathering restrictions. The dates and times can be found on the schools’ websites at hel.fi/peruskoulut/en.

**Wed 15 January 2021**
Electronic enrolment for school begins. More information about the enrolment method and schedule is given in the compulsory education note delivered at the turn of the year.

**14–29 January 2021**
A hearing for a special support decision is held for the pupil and their guardians at the local school within this period.

**Wed 20 January 2021 at 8–10 or 17–19**
Enrolment at the pupil’s local school. Please bring the compulsory education note with you.

**Fri 29 January 2021**
Electronic enrolment to school ends.

**Fri 29 January 2021**
If the family moves to Helsinki after the enrolment period, and wants a place for the child at their local school, the guardians must contact the principal of the local school who makes the admission decision. The local school is assigned based on the family’s home address. You can check your local school on the Helsinki Service Map by entering your home address in the search field at palvelukartta.hel.fi/en/.

**Fri 5 March**
The school will send the admission decision and the decision for special support (if applied for) to the pupil’s home by post.

**Mon 22 March**
The application period for afternoon activities begins.

**Fri 25 April**
The application period for afternoon activities ends.

**Wed 11 August**
The school year begins. Visit the local school’s website to see what time school begins on Wednesday 11 August.

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### The local school is located in your neighbourhood

The child’s compulsory education begins in the year of their seventh birthday. School starts at the beginning of the autumn 2021 term for children who were born in 2014. Helsinki is divided into school admission areas. The City assigns every child a place at the comprehensive school close to their home, and this school is called the local school. However, the local school is not necessarily the closest one, but it is usually located within walking distance. The school network is designed so that almost all pupils can complete all of their comprehensive school studies at the local school. If the pupil goes to a joint comprehensive school (grades 1–9), there is no need to change schools when moving on to the seventh grade. In addition to the City’s own comprehensive schools, there are private contract schools operating in Helsinki as part of the City’s service network. There are also some private and state schools in Helsinki that operate independently. If the child needs special support, the aim is to offer the necessary support in the local school, if possible. This can mean integrated support in a mainstream classroom, or studying in a special needs classroom (not always available in the local school). Children who need extensive multidisciplinary special support (in the case of severe psychological problems, multiple or severe disabilities, intellectual or developmental disability, or autism spectrum, for instance) are provided with special education as a centralised service, which means that they may be assigned a place at a school other than their local school. These services cover supported special needs classes, extended compulsory education and special needs schools.

### Weighted-curriculum education

Schools may provide weighted-curriculum education, for which pupils are selected with an aptitude test. Pupils study the weighted subject for 1–2 extra hours on top of the national minimum time per week. Weighted-curriculum education begins in the 1st, 3rd or 7th grade, depending on the subject. In weighted-curriculum education, pupils can either form their own group or be placed in the same class with the other pupils. In the latter case, only lessons in the weighted subject, such as music, are held for a separate group.

### Basic education in different languages

In Helsinki, pupils have the opportunity to attend basic education in different languages. The options are basic education in English, bilingual education, Swedish-language immersion and English-enriched education.

#### Music:
Porolahden Suomeksioppimisto, a local music institute.

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### Applying for a school other than the local school

The child can also apply for a school other than their local school. The local school primarily admits pupils living in the area, but if places are available, the school may also admit other pupils. In such a case, the guardians are responsible for any expenses resulting from the pupil’s school transport.

### Admission policies

The Education Committee and its Finnish-language division define the admission policies in the Grounds of Admission. This document is available in (Finnish only) on the [edu.hel.fi/tervet-ulokouluun](edu.hel.fi/tervet-ulokouluun) website (see section Oppilaassikloto), at the schools and at the Education Division’s service point (email: kasvatusjakouluutus@hel.fi, tel. 09 310 44986).
What and how do schools teach?

The curriculum states the principles of schoolwork and the special emphases of the school. The school curricula are available in electronic format at ops.edu.hel.fi/ops/ (available in Finnish only). In the first two school years, learning focuses on basic knowledge and skills in different subjects. Children are encouraged to bring up their own ideas and areas of interest.

School helps a child build a positive self-esteem to learn and to explore the world independently. A functional learning environment is an important part of this process. All school facilities and the surroundings are learning environments, and with digital technology, the entire city expands into a learning environment. The school’s goal is to support the development of the pupils’ cognitive competence and every day and cooperative skills, which they will need in the future. Each child studies at least two long-term, cross-curricular and phenomenon-based entities during the school year. Phenomenon-based studies are studies where pupils examine real-world phenomena across school subjects.

The child learns, experiences and creates things together with others. A safe and friendly environment that promotes participation and well-being is a prerequisite for learning. Interaction between the teacher, the pupil and the entire group is an important foundation for learning.

The school week follows a timetable. In grades 1 and 2, pupils receive teaching for a minimum of 21 hours per week. The duration of lessons can vary from school to school. There might be more than one teacher in the classroom; another class teacher, a special needs teacher or a teacher of Finnish as a second language. A special needs assistant may also work in the classroom. The class may be divided into different groups for some of the study time. The pupils are provided with textbooks and other learning materials by the school free of charge. Subjects that all comprehensive school pupils in the 1st grade study are mother tongue and literature, A1 language, mathematics, environmental studies, religion or ethics and artistic and practical subjects, which include music, visual arts, crafts and physical education.

Guardians can ask the schools for more detailed information about the teaching of ethics and applying for teaching of the pupil’s own religion. At the start of the school year, the school informs the guardians about religious events held at the school. The guardians decide whether the pupil attends these events.
Afternoon activities

Afternoon activities after school

The City of Helsinki arranges afternoon activities after the school day for 1st and 2nd grade comprehensive school pupils and special support pupils. The activities consist of supervised and instructed free time activities for children. The children have an opportunity to play, exercise, meet with friends and relax, and participate in instructed activities both indoors and outdoors. The activities are planned together with the pupils. These activities also utilise the City’s art, exercise and cultural services, as well as its diverse urban nature. Together with the pupils, the aim is to create a respectful, safe and open atmosphere. In the afternoon activities, instructors take care of the children’s activities and safety during the afternoon. Children receive a snack during the activities. The children are also insured. A fixed monthly fee is charged for the activities, and guardians can apply for a fee reduction. The application period for the activities is 22 March–23 April 2021. The decisions are posted by the beginning of July. Applications are also accepted during the school year. The activities are provided at schools, playgrounds and facilities near school. The activities are provided by the City and various afternoon activity service providers that receive a grant from the City.

Information about afternoon activity places can be found at iltpaivahaku.hel.fi.

Activities during school holidays

During school holidays, pupils can attend ‘Säpinää ja toimintaa’ trips, day camps, events and fun activities at playgrounds. More detailed information about the events is available on the playgrounds’ websites as the holidays draw closer.

Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism spectrum disorder are provided with centralised holiday activities during school holidays and the summer holiday at school facilities. The activities are intended for pupils whose guardians are working during the holidays.

Morning activities

Information on morning activities is enclosed with the compulsory education note.

More information: afternoonsearch.hel.fi
Support for learning and well-being

Children may need support at school in order to develop their skills and achieve their full potential. Co-operation between the family and the school in supporting the child’s learning and growth is important. The school offers a wide range of support for learning.

Support measures may include:
- diverse and varied tasks
- studying in flexible teaching groups
- remedial teaching
- part-time special needs education
- student welfare services

If the child needs regular support and a wide range of simultaneous support measures for their schoolwork and learning, the first step is so-called intensified support. In such a case, the teacher, the child, and the guardians create a learning plan containing goals and support measures together. The teacher and guardians assess the learning outcomes and the adequacy of the support measures regularly. If the intensified support is not enough, more extensive 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. This requires an official special support decision and an individual education plan (IEP). The special support decision is assessed regularly and changed if necessary, and always reviewed when the pupil finishes the 2nd grade and before the start of the 7th grade. The school staff are responsible for taking care of the well-being of the pupils and the school community. Each school has a school welfare group, which usually consists of the principal, a special needs teacher, a school psychologist, a school social worker and a nurse. In some cases pupils, guardians and other parties are also invited to participate. The team is responsible for monitoring and promoting the safety and well-being of both the pupils and the learning environment. Schools implement programmes that reinforce interaction skills, and every school has procedures for crises and bullying. If necessary, a multidisciplinary specialist group is assembled to help a pupil in difficult situations, and the group can include members from outside the school.

Every school has a designated:

School social worker
- who helps if the pupil has problems with schoolwork, interaction with friends or if there have been major changes in the pupil’s life
- who investigates, instructs and provides guidance in matters related to parenting and the situation at home.

School psychologist
- who helps with any problems related to learning, concentration and mental health
- who investigates, instructs and provides guidance in matters related to parenting and the situation at home.

School nurse
- who meets with the pupil at annual health check-ups and other appointments.

School doctor
- who performs an extensive health check-up on all 1st, 5th and 8th grade pupils.

The student welfare services are available free of charge.
Language studies begin for all pupils in the 1st grade

The beginning of school also means the beginning of studies in the first foreign language or a second national language. This language is called the A1 language. Pupils study the A1 language for two hours per week. In the first years, the emphasis is on practising oral language skills. The pupils learn the language through games, play, songs and other activities. The goal of the teaching is to inspire and motivate the pupils to be interested in languages and language studies.

Other languages are also studied later in basic education. Studies in a second common language, called the B1 language, start in the 6th grade. Additionally, the pupils have an opportunity to study an optional A2 language starting in the 3rd grade, the 8th grade and, in some cases, the 7th grade. Every pupil must study the second national language, i.e. Swedish, starting in the 6th grade at the latest.

In Helsinki, the available A1 languages are Chinese, English, Estonian, French, German, North Sami, Russian, Spanish and Swedish. Not all the languages listed are available at every school. At the majority of schools, the A1 language can be chosen from at least two alternatives, but at some schools, only English is available.

The language selection of the pupil’s local school can be found on the school’s website. The guardians and the child choose the studied languages together, and the guardians confirm the child’s language choices when enrolling the child to school. More detailed information about language studies and teaching is available at the schools’ information events and parents’ evenings in pre-primary education.

Language studies at comprehensive school

- compulsory languages common to everyone
- optional language starting in the 7th or 8th grade
- compulsory language starting in the 6th grade
- optional language starting in the 3rd grade
Swedish-language immersion

The Swedish-language immersion programme starts in early childhood education or pre-primary education and continues in comprehensive education. In Swedish-language immersion, new pupils continue at the school determined in their own language immersion path.

Basic education in English

In basic education in English, all teaching is provided in English, with the exception of Finnish language and literature. Pupils applying for the education are required to have native-level English-language skills. The applicant is not required to know Finnish. The goals and contents of basic education in English are the same as those of Finnish-language education. The applicant is not required to be able to read or write in the aptitude test.

Bilingual education

In bilingual education, the pupils study all subjects in both languages, depending on the grade and the school-specific curriculum. The pupil develops skills in a language that is new to them. Bilingual learning also develops problem-solving skills, creative thinking and adaptation to new situations. The content and objectives of the curriculum in bilingual education are the same as in Finnish-only education.

Bilingual education can be applied for by signing up for an aptitude test, which is held in February. The aptitude test tests the applicant’s ability to study in two languages. The applicant is not required to be able to read or write in the aptitude test.

Basic education in English

- Maunulan ala-asteen koulu, a primary school in Maunula
- Ressun peruskoulu, a comprehensive school in Kampi

Bilingual education

Schools in Helsinki provide bilingual education in Chinese, English, Estonian, Russian and Spanish. Additionally, Pasilan peruskoulu, comprehensive school in Pasila provides bilingual Finnish-North Sami education. Pupils in the class are not required to speak North Sami as their first language, and all children who are interested in the language and/or have grown within its sphere of influence can apply.

In bilingual education, the pupils study all subjects in Finnish and the target language. 25–50% of the teaching is provided in the target language, depending on the grade and the school-specific curriculum. The pupil develops skills in a language that is new to them. Bilingual learning also develops problem-solving skills, creative thinking and adaptation to new situations. The content and objectives of the curriculum in bilingual education are the same as in Finnish-only education.

Bilingual education can be applied for by signing up for an aptitude test, which is held in February. The aptitude test tests the applicant’s ability to study in two languages. The applicant is not required to be able to read or write in the aptitude test. However, no aptitude test is held for those applying to Finnish-North Sami education, and everyone who is interested can sign up.

English-enriched education

Some schools in Helsinki provide English-enriched education. In English-enriched education, 10–25% of the teaching is provided in English. Studying in two languages develops the pupil’s problem-solving skills, creative thinking and adaptation to new situations. The content and objectives of the curriculum in English-enriched education are the same as in Finnish-only education.

No aptitude test is held for English-enriched education. It is available in the local schools for all pupils in the school admission area.

English-enriched education

- Itäkeskuksen peruskoulu, comprehensive school in Itäkeskus
- Jätkäsaaren peruskoulu, comprehensive school in Jätkäsaari
- Kaisaniemen ala-asteen koulu, primary school in Kaisaniemi
- Kannelmäki peruskoulu, comprehensive school in Kannelmäki
- Lauttasaaren ala-asteen koulu, primary school in Lauttasaari
- Merilahden peruskoulu, comprehensive school in Meri-Rastila
- Pikku Huopalahden ala-asteen koulu, primary school in Pikku Huopalahdi
- Ruoholahden ala-asteen koulu, primary school in Ruoholahdi
- Siiltamäen ala-asteen koulu, primary school in Siiltamäki
- Taivallahden peruskoulu, comprehensive school in Töölö
- Vattuniemen ala-asteen koulu, primary school in Lauttasaari

Finnish as a second language

The pupil can study Finnish as a second language (S2) if their mother tongue is not Finnish, Swedish or a Sami, or if the pupil is multilingual. The pupil’s Finnish language skills are assessed at school, but the guardians decide whether the pupil will study Finnish as a second language. The pupil can study Finnish as a second language as long as necessary or can switch to Finnish as a first language when their competence in the Finnish language develops. Finnish as a second language teaching is not remedial or special needs teaching, nor does it increase the pupil’s weekly number of study hours. Finnish as a second language teaching can be provided either in separate S2 groups or in Finnish as first language classrooms.

Mother tongue studies

The City of Helsinki offers studies for maintaining the pupil’s mother tongue, home language or language skills obtained abroad. The language studies are organised on demand if there are enough pupils enrolled. The studies complement comprehensive education, increasing the weekly studywork by two hours. Participating these studies is mentioned in the report card, but no numerical grade is given. The studies are available for pupils whose mother tongue or home language is not Finnish, pupils whose close relatives speak Romani or Sami as their mother tongue or home language, and pupils who want to maintain the language skills they have obtained abroad. Enrollment in the mother tongue studies can be done upon school enrolment or later by contacting the school directly. Participation in the studies is optional; however, once the pupil has enrolled in the studies, they are required to attend the lessons regularly. Sometimes the studies may be organised at another school than the pupil’s local school.
Assessment of learning

Purpose of assessment

Assessment of learning aims to guide and encourage the pupil to study and develop good self-assessment skills. The assessment of learning is based on the objectives and descriptions of good learning outcomes defined in the curriculum. The pupil’s learning, schoolwork and behaviour are assessed in various ways while taking the pupil’s individual objectives into account. In practice, this means assessment during the school year and at the end of the school year. In the past, school year reports and grades were the primary measures of assessment and the only indicators of the pupil’s skills, but this is no longer the case. Assessment is used as a tool to guide and support the pupil’s personal learning path instead of focusing solely on task-based performance. The purpose of assessment is to help the pupil realise how they can influence their own learning and progress. The development of the pupil’s self-assessment and peer feedback skills is an important part of the assessment at school.

Assessment during the school year

The pupil receives regular feedback during the school year, as natural part of everyday 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. The development of the pupil’s self-assessment and peer feedback skills is an important part of the assessment at school.

Assessment at the end of the school year

Pupils receive an annual report card at the end of the school year. The report card assesses, verbally or numerically, the pupil’s achievement of their objectives in different subjects. Pupils are not compared with each other. The report cards for grades 1–3 use verbal assessment exclusively, which focuses on the pupil’s learning, progress and general studying and working skills. In grades 4–9, assessment is number-based.

Assessment as dialogue

Good assessment is dialogue between teachers and pupils in a positive atmosphere. During the school year, the pupil, teacher and guardians discuss the pupil’s learning. Assessment tools, such as portfolios and self and peer feedback, support the dialogue. The guardians’ confidence in the pupil’s abilities influences the pupil’s image of themselves as a learner significantly. The pupil’s strengths should always be the starting point for assessment and feedback.
**Practical matters**

**Schoolwork and holidays**
Going to school is the pupil’s job. School term dates and holidays can vary slightly from school to school. Families should plan their holidays so that they coincide with the school holidays, as absences reduce the amount of teaching that the pupil receives. For a special reason, the guardians can apply for exemption from schoolwork for the child. In such a case, the guardians must ensure that the child does all the schoolwork assigned to them. This will ensure that the absence does not hinder the child’s learning.

**School lunch and snacks**
Pupils get a free warm meal every school day. They can also buy a snack from the school cafeteria in the afternoon.

**School transport subsidy**
A school transport subsidy may be a student travel card from Helsinki Region Transport (HSL/HRT) or special transportation. The travel card is only available for a pupil of a municipal school residing in Helsinki. If the distance between the pupil’s home and school is more than two kilometres, the guardians can apply for a travel card for the pupil. The travel card is available for pupils who:
- receive weighted-curriculum education or Swedish-language immersion education at a school other than their local school
- study in a special needs class at a school other than their local school
- need to travel more than two kilometres to school.

Guardians can apply for special transportation if the pupil 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.
Participation and sustainable development

The City of Helsinki’s curriculum encourages pupils to take part in planning and developing the school’s teaching, operating culture and learning environment. The pupils are actively involved in planning, implementing and assessing their own learning. Being active and committing to the school’s activities improves the learning outcomes and increases happiness. Participation also plays an important role in promoting equality at schools. Together with the teachers, the pupils commit to working towards an equal and non-discriminating school. All comprehensive schools have a students’ union with a board elected each year. All comprehensive schools are involved in Ruuti, the City of Helsinki’s platform for young people, which aims to increase participation among children and young people. The comprehensive schools of Helsinki promote sustainable development. The schools use energy, water and materials sparingly and sort their waste. All comprehensive schools in Helsinki have included an environmental programme to their annual action plans. Almost all municipal comprehensive schools have a pupils’ environmental group that develops the school’s environmental work together with its pupils and teachers.
Co-operation between home and school

The goal of co-operation between home and school is to support the pupil’s growth and learning, as well as the well-being of the entire school community. Successful co-operation is based on mutual trust, and open dialogue. The principles of co-operation between school and home are defined in the school curriculum. The school and guardians agree on the best practices for co-operation. The co-operation should be reciprocal. The guardians have the primary responsibility for their child’s upbringing and compulsory education. The school’s task is to support the pupil’s growth and learning as a member of the school community. The guardians must notify the school as soon as possible, if their child cannot go to school.

Parent networks and the school board

Parents and guardians can get to know each other at events organised by the school or parent committees. Each school has a board that consists of parent representatives and a pupil representative. The City of Helsinki’s Education Committee makes an official decision on the members for a four-year term. Pupil representatives have the right to attend and speak at the board meetings. The board approves the school’s action plan and the school rules annually, and decides on certain disciplinary matters.

Tips for first-graders’ guardians

► Show interest in your child’s schoolwork and education.
► Spend time with your child and be present.
► Make sure your child feels safe and loved.
► Support your child in developing their social skills.
► Make sure your child eats balanced and healthy meals throughout the day.
► Make sure that your child has enough physical activity and rest.
► Read with your child.
► Be a parent to your child and set limits.
► Make sure your child uses media moderately, safely and responsibly.
► Build good rapport and mutual trust with the school.


Useful links

► Mannerheim League for Child Welfare mll.fi
► Suomen Vanhempainliitto ry (Finnish Parents’ League) vanhempainliitto.fi
► Väestöliitto (Family Federation of Finland) vaestoliitto.fi
► Helsingin vanhemmat ry HELVARY (Helsinki region parents committee Helvary) helvary.fi
Education Division
tel. 09 310 44986 on weekdays at 10am–12noon and 1pm–3pm
e-mail: kasvatusjakoulutus@hel.fi

street address: Töysänkatu 2 D, 00510 Helsinki
postal address: PO Box 51300, 00099 City of Helsinki
switchboard: 09 310 8600 on weekdays at 8.15am–4pm

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