

# School meals in Finland

School meals are important to children's and young people's wellbeing. A school meal is more than nutrition, contributing to learning, healthy growth and development.

Finnish legislation guarantees pupils and students the right to free meals during school days from pre-primary and basic education until the completion of upper secondary education.

## **A GOOD SCHOOL MEAL IS SEEN AS AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE**

In Finland each pupil and student from pre-primary to upper secondary education can enjoy a free school meal. Nearly 830 000 pupils and students are entitled to free school lunch. In addition to this, some 60 000 children taking part in before- and after-school activities get to enjoy a snack. Some education providers

also offer a snack to children taking part in school clubs.

Regular meals constitute significantly to children and young people's wellbeing, their ability to learn and to their healthy growth and development. Meal breaks should allow pupils and students to enjoy their meals in a calm, enjoyable and unhurried manner. Breaks also give pupils and students a chance to interact with

others and take a break from teaching.

People in Finland are generally proud of the country's long and unique history of providing free school meals. The law that ensures a free school meal for all children dates back to 1943. The aim was to support the wellbeing and learning of children.

A good lunch is more than nutrition. It is something that gives pleasure, relaxes,

## **SCHOOL MEALS GENERALLY CONSIST OF TYPICAL FINNISH FOODS.**

### **A GOOD SCHOOL MEAL CONSISTS OF**

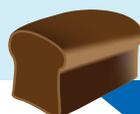
#### **▪ a warm main course**



#### **▪ a side of vegetables**



#### **▪ bread and table spread**



#### **▪ a drink**



#### **▪ water to quench thirst**



refreshes, maintains the ability to work and helps children grow healthy. A good school meal is seen as an investment in the future.

School meals generally consist of typical Finnish foods. A good school meal consists of a warm main course, vegetables, bread and table spread and a drink. Government guidelines offer more detailed support for planning and serving school food.

### **SCHOOL MEALS SUPPORT LEARNING OF HEALTH, NUTRITION AND TABLE MANNERS**

National and local regulations form the basis for school meal practices. Education acts and decrees along with national core curricula and local curricula are central documents governing school lunches.

Local and school-level curricula define the central principles of arranging school catering. The curricula also describe the objectives for education in health, nutrition and manners. The health-related and social role of school meals, the objectives of nutritional education and learning of manners as well as the recreational aspect of lunch breaks is taken into account when arranging school meals and snacks offered during the school day.

### **PUPILS AND STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN IMPROVING SCHOOL MEALS**

Municipalities and other education providers are responsible for the practical implementation of school meals. They also allocate resources for school catering. Legislation, norms and recommendation require that operations are evaluated and developed on the school level. The implementation, quality

and effectiveness of school catering should be monitored continuously as part of the overall evaluation of education. It is also important to give students the chance to actively participate in the evaluation and pay attention to their feedback and suggestions.

## School meals are part of education

### **INDIVIDUAL NUTRITIONAL AND HEALTH ISSUES ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT**

School meals are organised in cooperation between the school and personnel responsible for meals. Support needs and monitoring concerning pupils' individual nutritional needs are agreed on in cooperation between the pupils concerned, their parents and school health care staff.

Students' allergies, ethics and religion

diet specifically differs from recommendations. Special diet meals are served according to the student's diet plan, list of unsuitable food items or medical certificate submitted to school. List of ingredients is generally made available for special diet meals so students can make sure that the meal is suitable for their diet.

### **SNACKS IN SCHOOLS SHOULD BE HEALTHY**

Children taking part in before- and after-school activities are entitled to a snack. Similarly to school lunches snacks are used as a pedagogical tool in teaching children about proper nutrition, table manners and food culture. Snacks are designed to offer variety and take into consideration Finnish nutritional guidelines as well as children's individual needs.

A snack may also be offered to children taking part in school clubs. Snacks can either be provided by the school kitchen free of charge or for a fee, or children can bring their snack from home.

According to the recommendations sweets, sugary drinks and energy drinks should not be

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are taken into consideration when planning school activities and meals. The objective is to ensure the basic diet suits as many students as possible. Support needs and monitoring concerning pupils' individual nutritional and health issues or treatment of an illness are agreed in cooperation between the pupils concerned, their parents and school health care staff.

Special diet meals must meet common nutritional guidelines unless the

## Parents are consulted about vending machines and marketing

made regularly available in schools and educational institutions. Vending machines and school kiosks should offer healthy and nutritious products. Foods that are rich in fat, sugar and salt are not recommended as daily choices.

Parents are consulted about acquiring vending machines or setting up school kiosks. Parents also have the right to decide what kind of marketing their children are subjected to.