

Timo Kumpulainen (Ed)

# KEY FIGURES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD AND BASIC EDUCATION IN FINLAND



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## Foreword

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**Dear reader,**

Education in Finland continues to interest educationalists all over the world. This report contributes by providing data on early childhood education and care and basic education in English. The report focuses on children and pupils in Finnish early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and basic education. The focus is on participation, support for learning, teachers and the school environment. The aim is to highlight perspectives of international interest or characteristics otherwise typical of the Finnish early childhood and basic education system and the instruction provided. Where applicable, the information presented has also been linked to its international frame of reference. Indicators from the OECD Education at a Glance have been used as sources of international comparative data. The main source of quantitative data from Finland is Vipunen, [www.vipunen.fi](http://www.vipunen.fi), the statistical data service provided by the education administration.

The report is divided into two main chapters, the first of which explores the number of pupils in early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and basic education and the choice of subjects, the completion of the syllabus and admission to further education among pupils in basic education. The second chapter concentrates on the school environment containing data on teachers, the school network, group size and measures related to support for learning and school attendance. The report concludes with a section examining the cost of education. The subchapters each begin with an infobox providing context for the topic at hand and outlining key factors that have emerged in the assessment.

The report lends support to the common perceptions according to which the strengths of early childhood education and care and basic education in Finland lie in equal opportunities for education, less prominent differences between

schools compared to other countries, a high educational level among early childhood educators and teachers and the delegation of the power to make decisions to the local level. Basic education in Finland can be assessed to be relatively effective. The cost of basic education is close to the average of OECD countries, the amount of instruction time in compulsory subjects is lower than the average of OECD countries, and repeating a grade is rare.



Kristiina Volmari  
Head of information and analysis services  
Finnish National Agency for Education

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# 1

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# Pupils in early childhood education and care, pre-primary and basic education

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This chapter explores the participation of children and pupils in early childhood education and care (ECEC), pre-primary education and basic education as well as the choice of subjects, the completion of the syllabus and admission to further education among pupils in basic education.

## 1.1 Early childhood education and care and pre-primary education

- In addition to ECEC centres, an important form of early childhood education is family day care
- ECEC is subject to a fee which depends on family income.
- Public support is available for the home care of children under three years of age.
- Participation in pre-primary education is compulsory for all six-year-olds.
- Local authorities are obliged to arrange day care and pre-primary education.
- In ECEC the vouchers widen families possibilities to choose between different private sector services

In Finland, all parents of children under school age have a subjective right to early childhood education and care for their children for 20 hours per week. Local authorities must arrange these opportunities either as a service provided by the municipality or as a service purchased from private providers. Participation in pre-primary education is compulsory for all six-year-olds.

One of the strengths of early childhood education and care in Finland is the early recognition of the need for special support. The child health clinic system guarantees that the physical and mental development of all children is monitored on a regular basis.

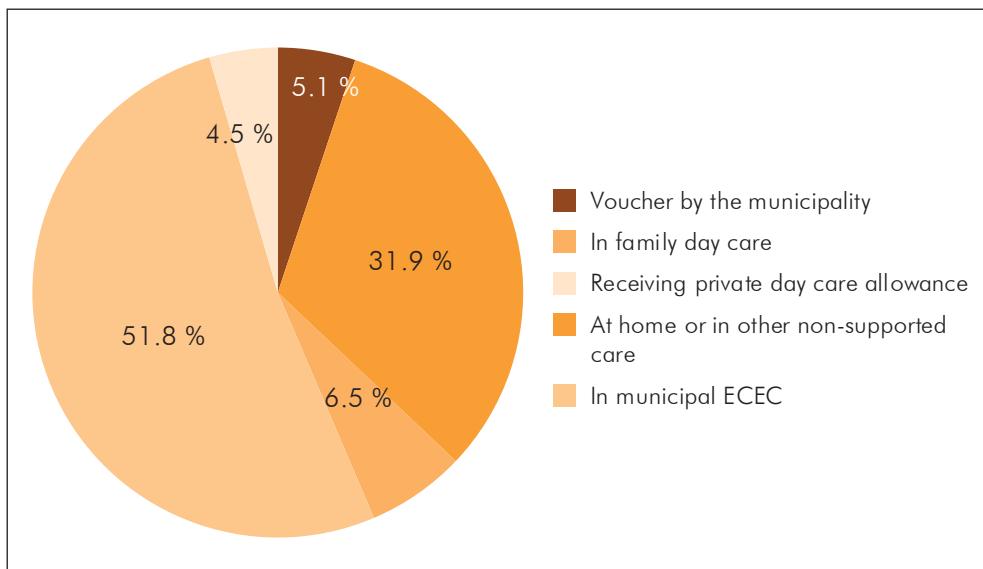
In 2016, children aged between 1 and 6 numbered 358 400. Out of them, 68 per cent, or 244 000 children participated in early childhood education and care provided in ECEC centres or family day care. In 2000, the share was 59 per cent, so in the 2000s the proportion has increased 9 percentage points. From an international standpoint, the participation rate is, however, low.

In Finland, mothers are entitled to maternity allowance for approximately four months, after which the families are entitled to parental allowance paid to one parent or divided between the parents and paid to both parents simultaneously. Parental leave ends when the child is approximately nine months old. After parental leave, the father can opt to take paternity leave and receive financial support for it. The mother, father or other carer can stay at home to take care of a child under three-years of age and receive child home care allowance. Finland has made the political decision to support the home care of children via government funding. The support varies depending on the family income.

### **ECEC voucher provides freedom of choice**

Since 2015 information has been collected about the children who have been granted a voucher by the municipality to attend early childhood education and care. In 2016 about 5 percent of the children aged 1-6 (18 300 children altogether) participated in early childhood education and care using a voucher granted by their municipality. The voucher makes it possible to choose the private ECEC centre in a more flexible way, as the family can choose either among municipal or private ECEC centres accepted by the municipality.

The majority of children, however, participate in ECEC provided by the municipality. Home care is relatively common, more than 30 per cent, especially in international comparison.



**Figure 1.** Figure 1. Children aged 1 to 6 in day care and home care (2016)

National Institute for Health and Welfare. SOTKA-database.

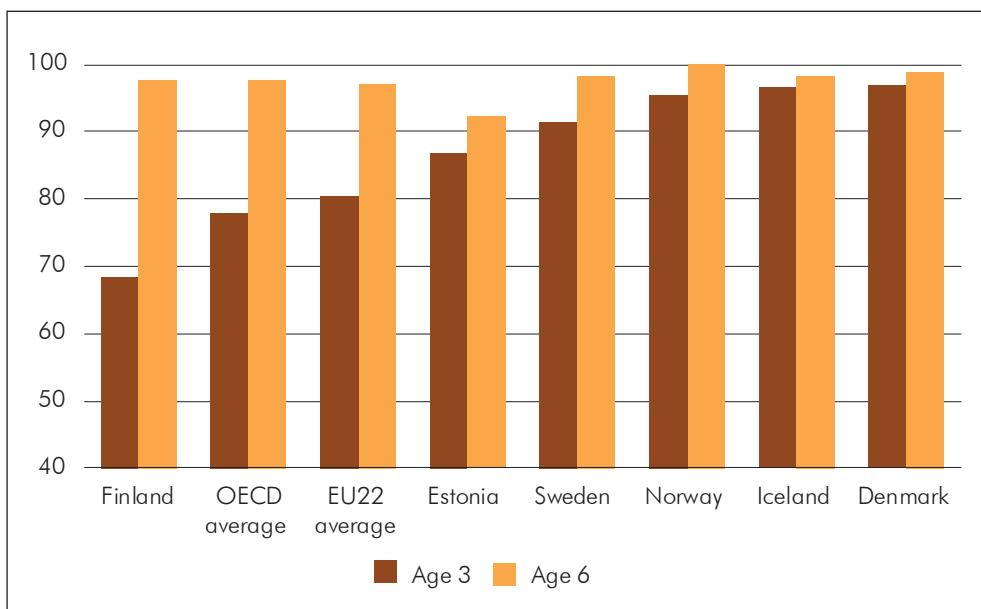
### There are great differences in participation between age groups and areas

There are significant differences in the rate of participation in early childhood education between children of different ages. Children under the age of one are generally cared for at home. In 2016, only 0.7 per cent of children under the age of one participated in early childhood education and care, whereas the corresponding figures for one-year-olds and two-year-olds are 28.4 and 54 per cent.

Since the turn of the millennium, local authorities have been obliged to provide free pre-primary education to the entire age group of six-year-olds. However, participation in pre-primary education was voluntary until 2015. From August 2015, participation in pre-primary education or other activities attaining the objectives of pre-primary education has been compulsory. In practice, almost all 6-year-olds have already taken part in pre-primary education for the last 15 years.

There are noticeable geographical differences between the number of children in early childhood education organised outside home. In the capital area and Åland Islands the children participate in early education and care outside home in much greater numbers than on average in the whole country.

Local authorities can decide whether pre-primary education is organised within either early childhood education and care or in conjunction with basic education. In 2016 approximately 82 per cent participated in pre-primary education in ECEC centres and 18 per cent in a school. Most commonly, the length of a day of instruction in pre-primary education is four hours on workdays during the school year. For the rest of the day, families have the right to early childhood education and care for their children. This right is used by the majority of the families.



**Figure 2.** Enrolment rates in ECEC and primary education, 3-year-olds and 6-year-olds (2015), Nordic countries and Estonia

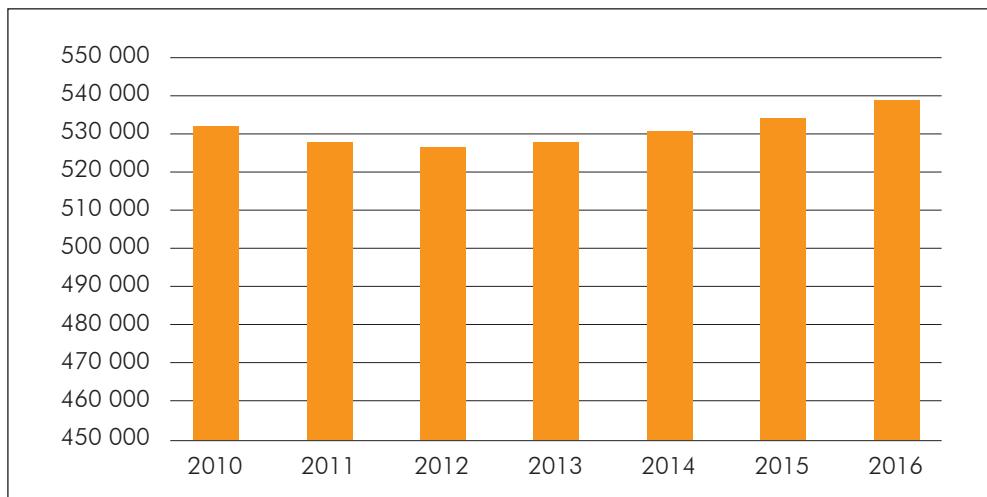
OECD, Education at a Glance 2017

Even though the rate of participation in early childhood education and care among Finnish three-year-olds has increased significantly since the beginning of the 2000s, it still remains among the lowest among the OECD countries. Finland differs essentially from the other Nordic countries. While the participation rate of three-year-olds is well over 90 per cent in Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, the figure for Finland only 68 per cent.

## 1.2 Pupils in basic education

- Practically all Finnish children complete the nine-year compulsory basic education.
- In 2016, the number of children in basic education was 539 000.
- Basic education is provided in both national languages, Finnish and Swedish, and in Sámi in the Sámi region.
- In 2016, approximately 6 per cent of children in basic education were Swedish-speaking.
- The share of basic education pupils speaking a foreign language was approximately 5 per cent.
- Out of children in basic education, 29 % live in the capital region in 2016.
- In Finland, the instruction time in compulsory subjects is 6 300 hours, which is more than 1 200 hours less than the OECD average.

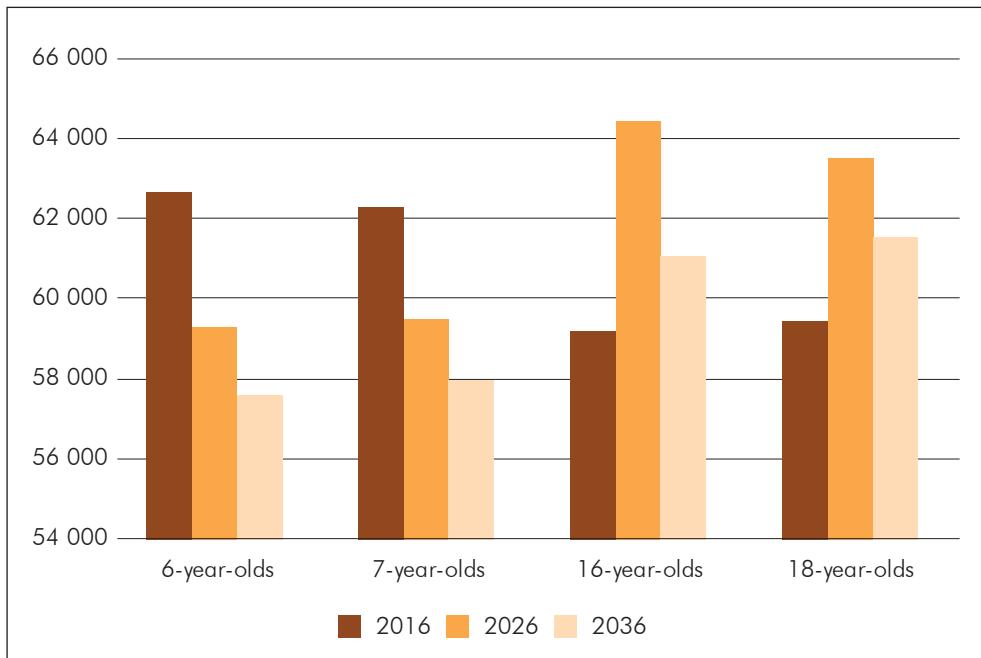
With the diminishing age groups, the number of pupils in basic education decreased until 2013. In 2014, however, the number of schoolchildren turned to a slight increase. In 2016, the number of pupils in basic education was nearly 540 000.



**Figure 3.** Pupils in basic education (grades 1-9) in Finland in 2010-2016

Statistics Finland - Vipunen - statistical service of the education administration

According to a population forecast, the number of pupils starting pre-primary education and first year of basic education will decline for the next decades.



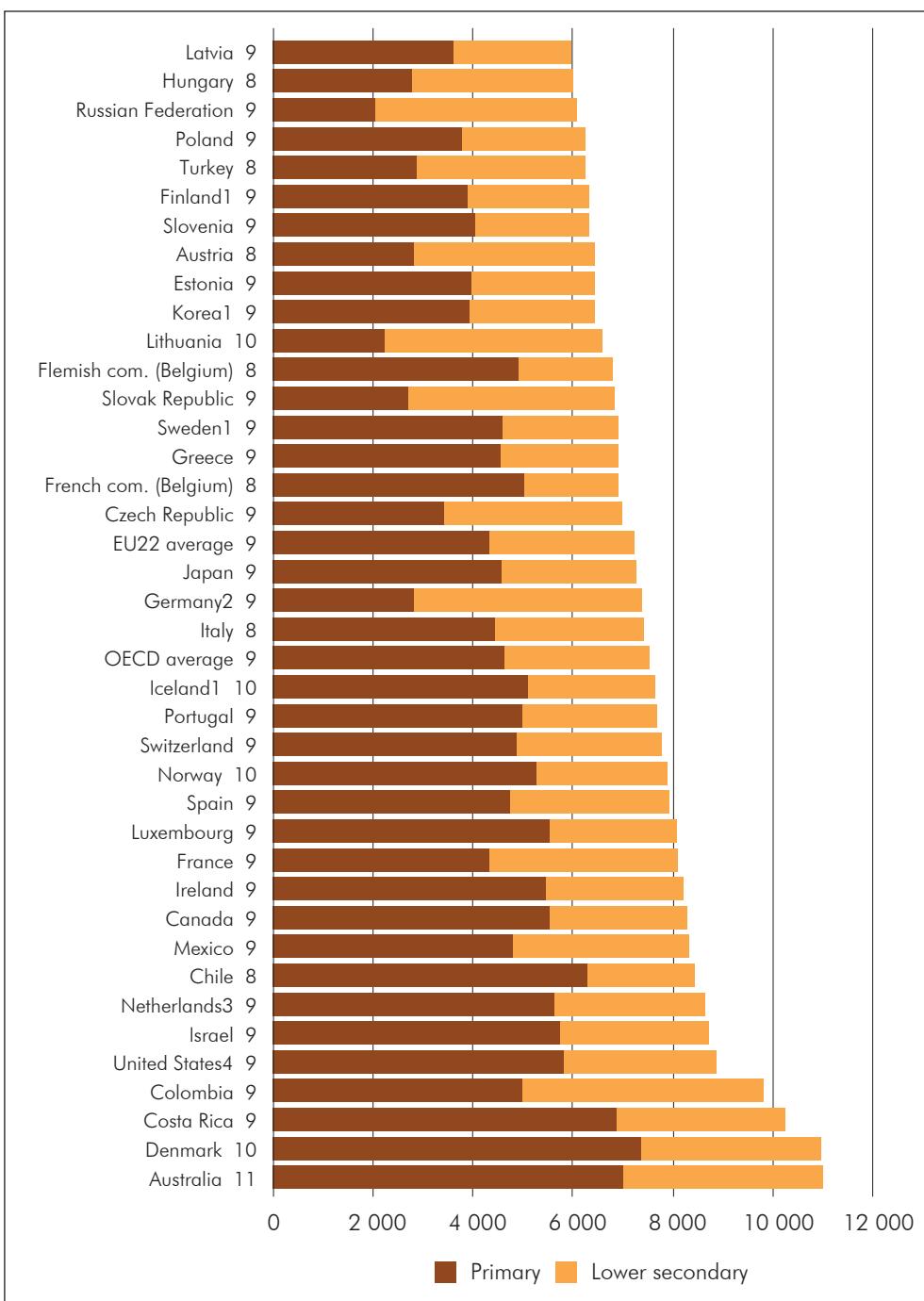
**Figure 4.** Age cohorts of children and young people in Finland in 2016, 2026 and 2036

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – statistical service of the education administration

While in the year 2016, 62 000 students started the basic education, the estimation for the year 2036 is 5000 school starters less.

### Number of lessons hours is low in Finland

In Finland the length of the school year as well as the day when the school year ends and the number of compulsory lesson hours are governed by statutes. Instruction time in compulsory subjects is 6 300 hours during the nine-year basic education, which is more than 1 200 hours less than the OECD average.



**Figure 5.** Compulsory instruction time in general education 2017

OECD Education at a Glance 2017.

Out of the OECD countries, the number of instruction hours in compulsory subjects was the lowest, 6 000 hours, in Latvia. The number of instruction hours was the highest in Australia, with 11 000 hours.

## Foreign-language pupils

The number of pupils speaking a language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi as their mother tongue in basic education has increased slightly in the last few years. In 2016 approximately 37 000 pupils with a native language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sámi were studying in Finnish basic education.

**Table 1.** Number of pupils with mother tongue other than Finnish or Swedish 2013-2016

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	Proportion of all pupils in 2016 (%)
Number of pupils	29 235	31 227	33 528	36 864	6.8

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – a statistical service of the education administration

In the capital area the number of those children whose mother tongue is not Finnish, is considerably bigger than the mean of the whole country. In 2016 nearly 13 percent of the capital area students were those whose mother tongue was not Finnish.

## 1.3 Subjects chosen

Although the core of the instruction time comprises compulsory subjects for all pupils, there is some freedom of choice in Finnish schools. Typically pupils can choose optional language studies. Statistics on subject choices in basic education cover studies in national and foreign languages, whether core or optional, ethics and religion and optional subjects forming part of core subjects.

Data on language choices indicates what languages the pupils have studied, the scope of the syllabus and how many languages were studied. The languages and courses available depend on the school. There is no obligation for schools to offer free-choice and optional languages.

### **1.3.1 Languages chosen**

- Almost 80 per cent of pupils in basic education study two compulsory languages, which in most cases are English as first and Swedish as second foreign language. Approximately 20 per cent of pupils study at least three foreign languages.
- As a general rule, pupils start their first foreign language in 3rd grade (age of 9). In 2016, eleven per cent of children began studying their first foreign language already during their first year at school.
- In less than 10 years, the studying of optional languages has undergone a clear decline, a development that, more than anything, is probably indicative of the narrowing of the selection available.

Pupils may study several foreign languages. All languages apart from the school's language of instruction are considered foreign languages. Language selections are generally divided into core (compulsory) and optional (free-choice) languages. Pupils generally begin studying their first language (A1) in their third year of basic education and their second language (B1) in their seventh year. In addition, a pupil may select an optional third language (A2) that begins, by latest, in the fifth year and an optional fourth language generally starting in the eighth year of basic education.

#### **English is the most commonly studied foreign language**

No essential changes have taken place in the choice of first foreign language in the last years and decades. The position of English in relation to other languages is very strong. In 2016, almost 90 per cent of third grade pupils were studying English. The proportion of Swedish as a first language appears to have stabilised at one per cent, French and German slightly over one per cent. The share of pupils learning Russian as their first language has increased slightly from 0.2 per cent to 0.3 per cent. Since 2011, statistical data has also been gathered separately on Spanish, although opting for Spanish as a first foreign language remains rare.

**Table 2.** Choice of first foreign language. Percentage of pupils per language. Year 2000-2016

	2000	2005	2010	2016
English	89.1	90.1	90.5	89.8
Swedish	1.5	1.1	1.0	1.1
Finnish	5.2	5.5	5.2	5.5
French	1.1	0.8	0.9	1.3
German	2.2	1.4	1.3	1.3
Russian	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Spanish	*	*	*	0.3
Sámi	0.0	0.0	0.0	**
Other language	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2
Languages total	99.3	99.2	99.2	99.7

\* Until 2010, Spanish was included in the category "Other language"

\*\* No choices at all

\*\*\* The percentage values were calculated based on the number of pupils in grade 3

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – statistical service of the education administration

The compulsory language starting in 6th grade is the second national language (=Finnish or Swedish), unless the pupil is already studying this as his or her first foreign language. In Swedish-speaking schools, Finnish is generally studied as first foreign language, and it is thus not compulsory for the pupils to study a second foreign language. In Finnish-language instruction, the second, compulsory language is Swedish.

## Choosing optional languages has declined

The number of pupils choosing to study optional languages has declined. Choosing German in particular has become less common. Russian and Spanish have seen a slight upward trend in recent years, even though the actual number of pupils still remains relatively small.

**Table 3.** Choice of first optional language in grade 5. Percentage of pupils per language. Year 2000-2016

	2000	2005	2010	2016
English	9.7	8.3	7.6	8.3
Swedish	7.0	7.7	7.5	7.2
Finnish	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.7
French	3	2.9	2.8	2.6
German	14.4	8.6	5.5	6.1
Russian	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.7
Spanish	*	*	*	1.1
Sámi	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
Other language	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.0
Languages total	35.1	28.5	25.3	26.7

\* Until 2010, Spanish was included in the category "Other language"

\*\* The percentage values were calculated based on the number of pupils in grade 5.

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – statistical service of the education administration

In 2016 only one in ten basic education pupils had opted for a second optional language beginning in eighth grade.

**Table 4.** Choice of second optional foreign language in grades 8-9. Percentage of pupils per language.  
Years 2000-2016

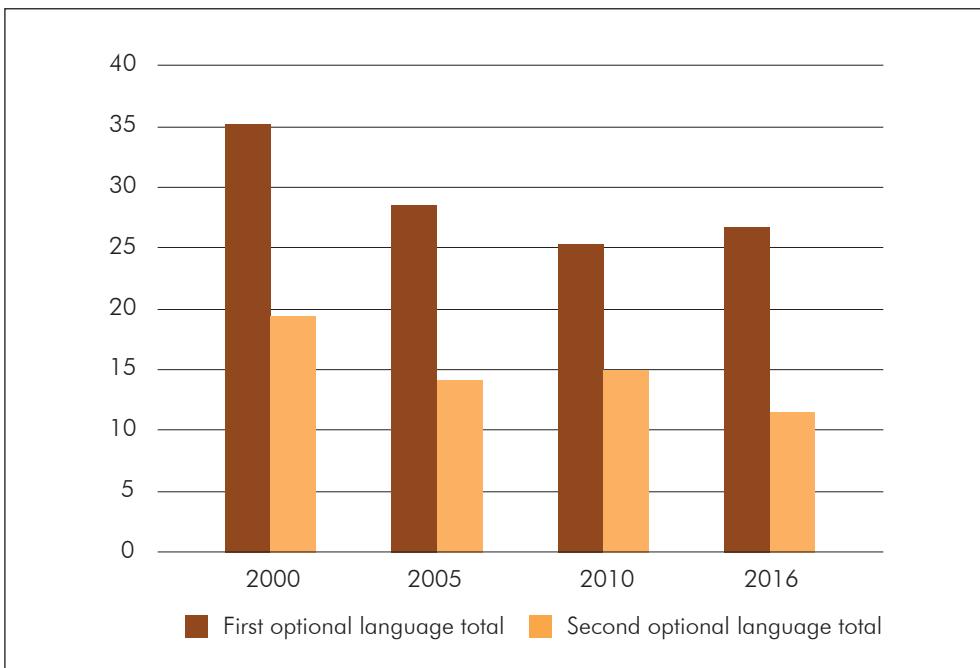
	2000	2005	2010	2016
English	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.0
Swedish	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0
Finnish	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
French	6.3	5.4	4.7	2.7
German	11.0	6.6	6.7	5.3
Russian	0.8	0.6	1.4	1.3
Spanish	*	*	*	1.8
Italian	*	*	*	0.1
Sámi	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Latin	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.2
Other language	0.2	0.6	1.8	0.0
Languages total	19.4	14.1	14.9	11.5

\* Until 2010, Spanish and Italian were included in the category "Other language"

\*\* The percentage values were calculated based on the number of pupils in grades 8 to 9.

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – statistical service of the education administration

The studying of optional languages has declined since the early years of the 2000s, primarily due to a reduction in the offering of optional languages by municipalities. In general, the number of lessons in the less-studied languages is sufficient to employ a teacher full-time only in the major cities.



**Figure 6.** Pupils studying optional languages in basic education in 2000-2016 (percentage of all pupils)

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – statistical service of the education administration

- Less pupils choose German as an optional language
  - Number of pupils studying Russian and Spanish increased slightly in recent years.
- Big geographical differences. For example in 2016, in the town of Lappeenranta near the Russian border, 9 per cent of pupils study Russian as their first foreign language and 9 per cent as their first optional language.

### 1.3.2 Studying religion and ethics

- Religion or ethics is a compulsory subject in basic education.
- The education provider must provide instruction in the pupil's own religion, in case pupils representing a given religion is three or more.
- Most pupils in basic education, around 90 per cent study Lutheranism.
- 4.2 per cent study some other religion, such as Orthodox Christianity or Islam.
- Ethics is a subject aimed at non-members of religious communities. Its starting points include philosophy and social and cultural sciences.
- In recent years, the share of ethics education has increased. In the capital region, almost 13 per cent of pupils study ethics.

Different religions and ethics are studied in grades 1 to 9 of basic education and in voluntary additional basic education. In 2016, nearly 89 per cent of pupils studied Lutheranism, seven per cent ethics, two per cent Islam, almost two per cent Orthodox Christianity and under one per cent other religions. Less than one per cent of pupils did not participate in the instruction of religion or ethics.

#### **Studying religion or ethics is compulsory**

In a comparison between 2010 and 2016 the studying of religion subjects other than Lutheranism has seen a relative increase. The rise has been the greatest in the studying of Ethics, which was studied by approximately 7 per cent of the pupils. The studying of Islam, which until 2012 was categorised under 'Other religions', has increased in recent years as well.

The situation in instruction in ethics in the capital region differs from the average for Finland. The share of pupils opting for ethics instead of religion is 13 per cent in the capital region, which is nearly double the average for Finland as a whole. The studying of Islam, too, is significantly more common in the capital region than in the rest of Finland. Particularly in Helsinki, the number of pupils receiving instruction in the various ethics/religion subjects differs essentially from other parts of Finland. In 2016 in Helsinki, 19 per cent of pupils studied ethics and the number of pupils studying Islam was 8.4 per cent of all pupils. The proportion of pupils studying Lutheranism was slightly over 66 per cent.

**Table 5.** Pupils studying religion or ethics 2010-2016

	2010	2012	2014	2016
	%	%	%	%
Lutheranism	93	91.8	90.3	88.6
Orthodox Christianity	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.6
Ethics	3.2	4.1	5.2	6.6
Other religions	1.9	0.5	0.5	0.5
Did not participate in the studying of religion or ethics	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6
Islam	**	1.5	1.8	2.1
Total	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

- From 2010 onwards the data is collected once in two years

\*\* Until 2010, Islam was categorised under "other religion"

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – a statistical service of the education administration

## 1.4 Completing the syllabus

- Compulsory education ends when the basic education syllabus has been completed or ten years have passed since the pupil began compulsory education.
- Practically the entire age group completes the basic education syllabus and receives a basic education certificate.
- In 2016, the number of pupils who had completely neglected their obligation to complete compulsory education was 94 and the number of those who had passed compulsory education age without completing basic education was 315.

Almost the entire age group completes the basic education syllabus and receives a basic education certificate. A basic education certificate is awarded to a person when he or she has satisfactorily completed the entire basic education syllabus. In 2016 approximately 58 000 pupils completed basic education.

Children in compulsory education must take part in instruction provided under the Basic Education Act or otherwise obtain skills and knowledge corresponding to the basic education syllabus. The parent or carer of a child under the

obligation to complete compulsory education must also ensure that the pupil completes his or her compulsory education. The municipality of residence is obligated to monitor the progress of a child in compulsory education if the pupil does not participate in instruction provided under the Basic Education Act.

**Table 6.** Choice of optional subjects in basic education in 2016. Number of pupils per subject

	Boys	Girls	Total
Mother tongue and literature	3 157	7 454	10 611
Second national language	394	659	1 053
Mathematics	2 787	2 275	5 062
Physics	977	531	1 508
Chemistry	1 231	879	2 110
Geography	301	364	665
Biology	2 148	1 716	3 864
Religion	314	406	720
Ethics	8	23	31
Environment and nature studies	100	94	194
History	1 429	857	2 286
Social studies	2 101	1 789	3 890
Music	6 493	12 913	19 406
Visual arts	10 217	22 978	33 195
Physical education	33 431	21 960	55 391
Health education	238	383	621
Home economics	34 699	37 831	72 530
Other subjects	24 004	15 755	39 759
<b>Total</b>	<b>124 029</b>	<b>128 867</b>	<b>252 896</b>

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – a statistical service of the education administration

Pupils who have neglected their obligation to complete compulsory education are not issued basic education certificate. Annually, the number of those who have neglected their obligation to complete compulsory education is small. In 2016, the number of persons who had completely neglected their obligation to complete compulsory education was 94 and the number of those who had passed compulsory education age was 315. In 2016 (0,5 %) of the year-group did not get the basic education certificate.

## 1.5 Transition to further studies after basic education

- After the completion of basic education, young people apply to further education electronically via the joint application system. The objective is to guarantee everyone completing basic education a study place on the next level of education.
- In major cities, there are significant differences in the popularity of general upper secondary schools. Some of the schools are left with many unfilled study places, whereas in others the number of applicants exceeds the number of places offered.
- In 2015, 42 per cent of young people completing basic education continued their studies immediately in vocational education and training, and the corresponding figure for general upper secondary education was 52.5 per cent.
- In 2015 approximately 3 300 young persons, i.e. 6 per cent of those completing basic education, did not gain admission to education leading to a degree.
- It is also possible to extend basic education by opting for one year of voluntary additional basic education or other preparatory education. In 2015, 3 per cent of those completing basic education, continued their studies immediately in the voluntary, additional tenth grade or other preparatory education.

The majority of those completing basic education apply to further education either in a general upper secondary school or in vocational education and training. The admissions process is carried out electronically via a joint application system between vocational education and training and general upper secondary education. Applicants may state a maximum of five institutions or fields of study in their order of preference. In the admissions process, the applicants are rated based on the points scored. The majority of the applicants are admitted to the educational institution and programme they have indicated as their first preference.

Some pupils completing basic education continue in post-basic education preparatory training. Those who have completed basic education may also apply for general upper secondary education provided by folk high schools.

Intake into vocational education and training is determined according to a national plan based on the anticipation of educational needs. The objective is that after graduation, young people would have a realistic opportunity of finding employment in their own field.

In spring 2017, upper secondary level educational institutions offered 43 700 study places in vocational upper secondary education and training and 37 800 study places in general upper secondary schools. According to population

statistics, the number of 16-year-olds in Finland at the end of 2016 was slightly under 59 200. Study places in upper secondary education numbered 1.4 times that, due to the fact that young people from several different age groups apply particularly for vocational upper secondary education and training. The objective is to guarantee everyone completing basic education a study place on the next level of education. Even though quantitatively, there are enough study places for everyone applying for upper secondary education, some fail to gain admission, as the wishes of applicants and the offering of vocational education and training in terms of the fields of study do not meet.

The most popular fields of education in the joint application system of 2017 were social services, health and sports, humanities and education and culture. The number of applicants indicating a primary preference in these fields was 1.10 -to 1.15 times the rate of intake in the said fields. Qualifications in the field of social services, health and sports offer good opportunities for employment, as the need for labour force in the caring professions is increasing with the ageing of the population. Culture remains still a popular field of study even though opportunities for employment, at least in wage work, are not particularly good.

**Table 7.** Most popular fields of vocational education and training in spring 2017

	Intake	Primary candidates	Ratio applicants / intake
<b>Vocational education and training</b>	<b>43 698</b>	<b>39 647</b>	<b>0.91</b>
- Humanities and education	727	797	1.10
- Culture	1 929	1 944	1.01
- Social sciences, business and administration	4 865	4 282	0.88
- Natural sciences	1 404	1 513	1.08
- Technology, communications and transport	19 582	17 332	0.89
- Natural resources and the environment	2 351	1 730	0.74
- Social services, health and sports	7 935	9 161	1.15
- Tourism, catering and domestic services	4 905	2 888	0.59
<b>General upper secondary education</b>	<b>37 787</b>	<b>33 746</b>	<b>0.89</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>81 485</b>	<b>73 393</b>	<b>0.90</b>

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – a statistical service of the education administration

General upper secondary education has clearly more study places than first-preference applicants, but even those applying for a general upper secondary

school are not necessarily admitted to the school of their primary preference. Significant differences in the popularity of general upper secondary schools are mainly found in the major cities. In practice, supply and demand do not always meet from a regional perspective. Some of the schools are left with many unfilled study places, whereas in others the number of applicants significantly exceeds the number of places offered. In vocational education and training, tourism, catering and domestic services and natural resources and the environment have significantly more study places than primary preference applicants.

### **The majority of those completing basic education continue directly to education leading to a degree**

In 2015, 97.3 per cent of young people completing basic education continued their studies in the same year in general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, preparatory education or voluntary additional basic education. The situation has remained almost the same compared to previous years. In 2015, 41.8 per cent (24 332) of young people completing basic education continued their studies immediately in vocational education and training, and the corresponding figure for general upper secondary education was 52.5 per cent (30 558).

**Table 8.** *Immediate transition of those having completed basic education to upper secondary education leading to a degree and to voluntary additional basic education and preparatory education 2014-2015*

Vuosi	2014		2015	
	number	%	number	%
Pupils completing 9th grade of comprehensive school. total	57 853	100.0	58 224	100.0
Continued studies immediately in general upper secondary education	29 857	51.6	30 558	52.5
Continued studies immediately in vocational education	24 357	42.1	24 332	41.8
Continued studies in preparatory education	414	0.7	1 118	1.9
Continued studies in additional basic education	688	1.2	626	1.1
Did not immediately transition to studies leading to a degree or 10th grade	2 537	4.4	1 590	2.7

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – a statistical service of the education administration

Part of those almost 1 600 pupils who failed to gain admission in education covered by the statistics, take part in workshop activities or institutions of liberal adult education. Efforts are also being made to encourage those who are not in education or in the labour market to continue their studies.

# 2 School environment

The chapter on school environment focuses on teachers, group size, the school network and measures and forms related to support for learning and school attendance.

## 2.1 Teachers in early childhood education and care and in basic education

In Finland, teachers' qualification requirements, working hours and salary are determined according to the level at which they serve. The lowest qualification requirements, a bachelor's degree from a polytechnic or a university, apply to early childhood education and pre-primary education provided in day-care centres. On all other levels, a master's degree is required.

### **Teacher qualifications:**

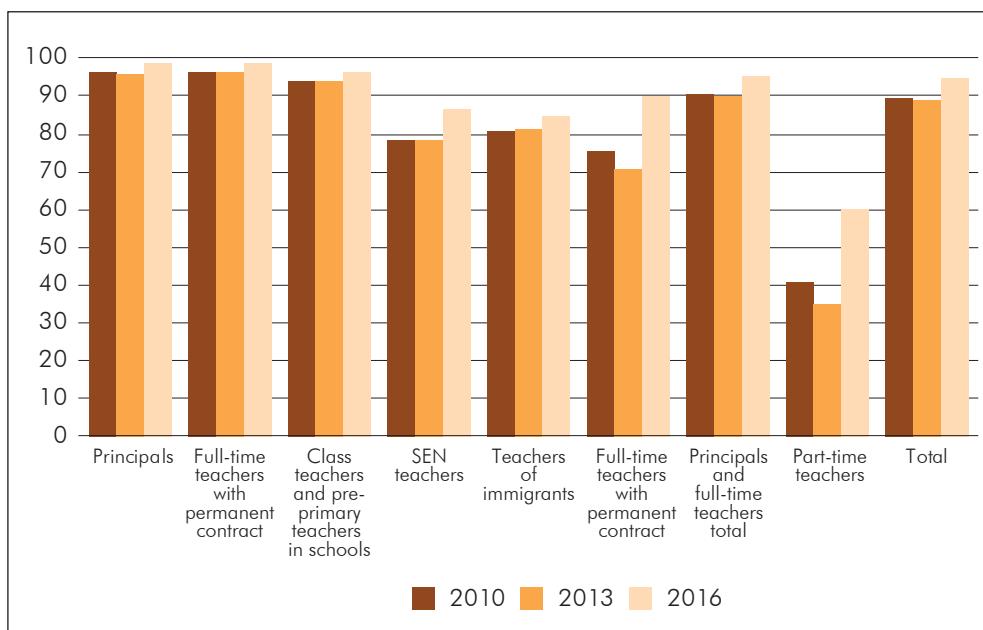
- Early childhood education and pre-primary education provided in connection with ECEC: university or polytechnic bachelor's degree with a minimum of 60 ECTS points in early childhood education and care
- Pre-primary education in schools: master's degree with a major in pedagogy or bachelor's degree with a minimum of 60 ECTS points in early childhood education and care
- Class teachers (generalists in grades 1-6 of basic education): master's degree with a major in education
- Subject teachers (in grades 7-9 of basic education): master's degree with a minimum of 120 ECTS points in one of the subjects taught and 60 ECTS points in other subjects taught
- More information [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Finland:Teachers\\_and\\_Education\\_Staff](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Finland:Teachers_and_Education_Staff)

## Most Finnish teachers are qualified

The lowest qualification rate can be found in early childhood education and care. In municipal day care, some 86 per cent of kindergarten teachers are qualified. In pre-primary education provided in schools, however, over 96 per cent of the teachers are qualified.

Out of full-time teachers and principals in basic education, more than 95 per cent are qualified. The qualification rate is the highest among full-time teachers with permanent contract and principals and lowest among part-time teachers. SEN teachers (special needs teachers) qualification rate has improved over eight percentage points from latest data collection.

In Swedish-language basic education, the situation is slightly worse than in Finnish-language instruction. Out of principals and teachers in Swedish-language basic education, 89 per cent are qualified. In Swedish-language basic education, the qualification rates are lower than in Finnish-language instruction.



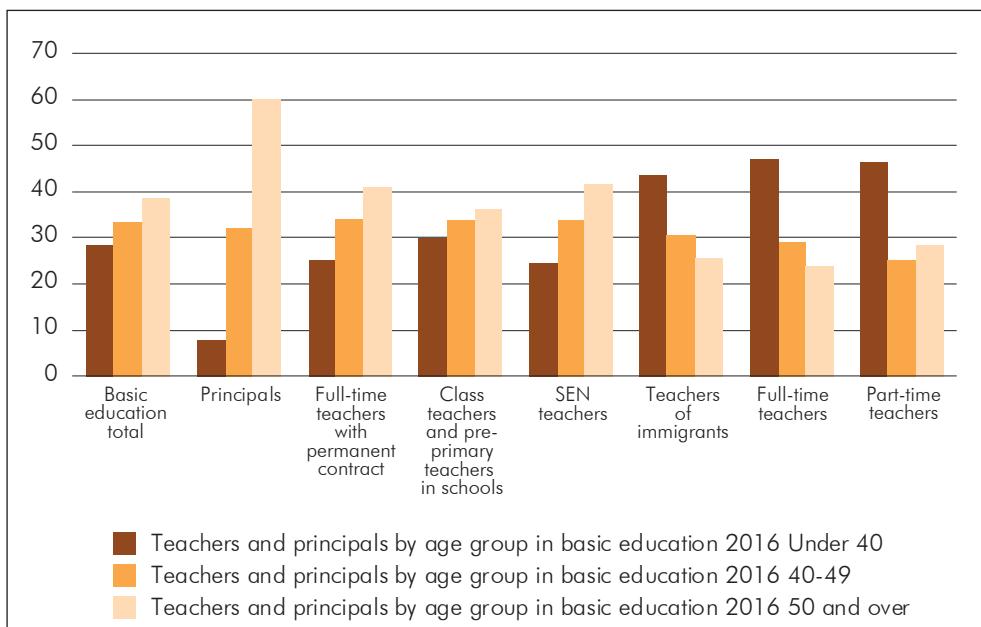
**Figure 7.** Percentage of formally qualified teachers in basic education by type of position 2010-2016

Statistics Finland - Vipunen - statistical service of the education administration

The qualification rates of teachers vary regionally. The situation is the poorest in the Helsinki-Uusimaa region, which includes the capital region and nearby municipalities. Out of class teachers in this region, 91 per cent are qualified.

## Majority of teachers over fifty

The ageing of teachers as a profession is a significant concern in Finland. Even though there are plenty of applicants for teacher education, the largest age group in almost all teacher groups is over 50-year-olds. In the age distribution of principals in particular, there is an emphasis on the older age group. Even though it is understandable that people do not qualify as principals at a very young age, the share of under 40-year-old principals still remains very small, just 7.9 per cent.



**Figure 8.** Teachers and principals by age group in basic education in 2016 (%)

Statistics Finland - Vipunen - statistical service of the education administration

In an international comparison, the situation in Finland is quite good. In basic education, the proportion of teachers over the age of 50 is slightly under the average of OECD countries. The OECD average is 30 per cent in primary school and 34 per cent in lower secondary school.

- The working time and salaries of teachers are agreed upon in the collective agreement for teaching personnel
- The working time of teachers is defined mainly as teaching hours
- With subject teachers, the number of hours taught varies according to the subject taught
- Teachers enjoy plenty of autonomy in their work: they are responsible for the assessment of pupils and are free to decide on matters such as the learning material used and often also purchases to be made by the school

## **Teachers' salaries are average in an international comparison**

Teachers' salaries are agreed nationally as part of collective agreements negotiated between the representatives for the employers, most commonly municipalities, and the teachers. The salary depends on the position in question and its requirements as well as the teacher's performance, his or her level of professionalism and work experience. In addition, a bonus can be paid based on the performance of the institution. Extra duties, such as being responsible for the school choir or language laboratory, are also compensated for. Years of service in public administration and teaching experience lead to increments. In case of schools located in major cities or in particularly remote areas, the location of the school also affects the salary. The salaries are approximately 3 per cent higher in such areas.

## **2.2 School network and group size**

- In 2016 the number of basic education schools was 2 440. The most common size of schools is still with less than 100 pupils, which in 2016 amounted to almost 36 % of all schools.
- The largest basic education schools in Finland have slightly over a thousand pupils.
- In the last few years, Finland's school network has been diminishing at the rate of approximately 80 schools per year. Most frequently, this has affected small schools of less than 50 pupils.
- In 2016 the average size of a basic education school was 221 pupils per school, whereas in 2010 it was 182 pupils.
- The average class size in a basic education school is slightly under 19 pupils.
- The share of groups categorised as large (over 25 pupils) has been halved in the past 5 years.

## One fifth of schools have less than 50 pupils

In 2016 the number of basic education schools was 2 440. Schools of less than 100 pupils amounted to approximately to 36 per cent of all schools. In 2016, the average size of a basic education school was 221 pupils per school, whereas in 2010 it was 182 pupils.

Regional differences exist in the number of pupils per school. In the capital region, the average number of pupils per school is 291, whereas in Lapland the corresponding figure is 166 and in the Åland Islands 124. The largest basic education schools in Finland have slightly over a thousand pupils.

**Table 9.** Changes in the network of educational institutions in the field of basic education in Finland in 2013-2016

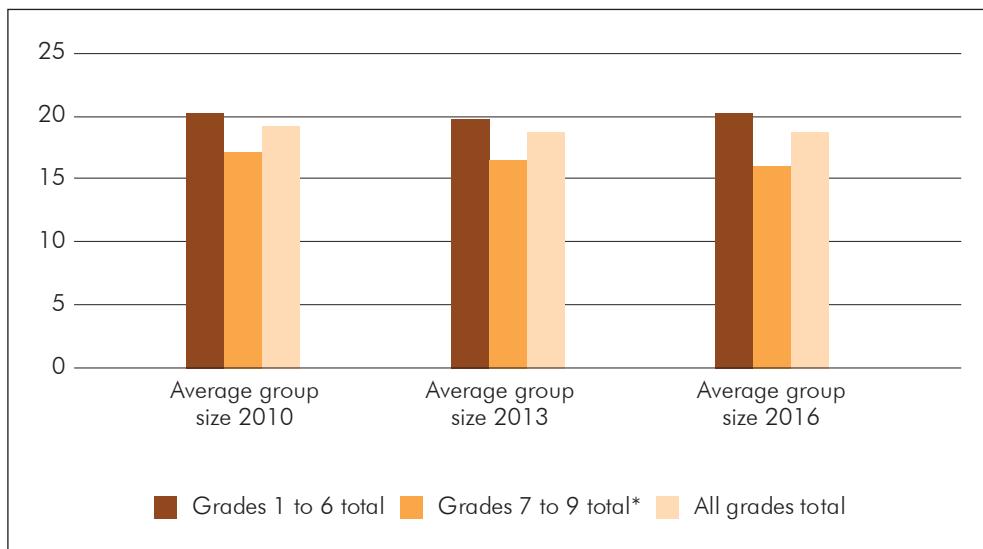
Year	2013	2014	2015	2016
Size of educational institution, (pupils/institution)	Number of institutions	Number of institutions	Number of institutions	Number of institutions
- 49	625	563	492	457
50 - 99	478	464	442	414
100 - 299	935	927	879	858
300 - 499	490	476	477	475
500 - 699	138	148	162	170
700 -	39	45	55	66
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 705</b>	<b>2 623</b>	<b>2 507</b>	<b>2 440</b>

Statistics Finland - Vipunen - statistical service of the education administration

In the 2000s, internal migration and the weakening finances of municipalities have led to a situation where the school network of basic education has diminished significantly. A large number of small village schools have been closed down. In 2000, more than a third of all comprehensive schools were schools with less than 50 pupils, whereas by 2016 their share had been reduced to less than a fifth. By 2016, less than 3 per cent of pupils were studying in these schools, when in 2000 more than seven per cent of pupils were studying in small schools. Debate is currently under way as to whether the expansion of school units constitutes a benefit or a disadvantage for the children and whether the financial gain expected from it will actually materialise.

## Group size in primary schools is 19 pupils on average

In 2016, the average group size in grades 1 to 6 was 20 pupils. In lower secondary education, grades 7 to 9, the average group size was 16 pupils. The share of teaching groups with over 30 pupils was under one per cent, and the proportion of teaching groups of 25 to 29 pupils was 11 per cent.



**Figure 9.** Average group size in basic education in 2010, 2013 and 2016

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – a statistical service of the education administration

In recent years, the number of large teaching groups have been reduced due to support measures implemented by the Government. Starting in 2010, the Ministry of Education and Culture has allocated special government subsidies for reducing group size in basic education. In 2013, a total 60 million euro was allocated to 239 education providers. In 2015, the Government allocated a total of 30 million euro for the purpose of reducing group size.

## 2.3 Support for learning and school attendance

- According to the reformed curriculum on support for learning and school attendance, the emphasis in support for special needs education was moved more clearly towards early and preventive support. Support is provided on three levels: general, intensified and special support.
- Pupils receiving special support have been issued an administrative decision regarding a transfer to special needs education
- In 2016, 16.3 per cent of all pupils in basic education received intensified and special support.
- In 2016, 8.9 per cent of all pupils in basic education receive special support.
- Out of pupils receiving special support, 19.7 % are fully integrated into groups of mainstream education, while 37.9 per cent are studying exclusively in special needs groups or classes. The remaining 42.4 % of pupils receiving special support are studying in groups of both mainstream education and special needs education.
- Out of those receiving special support, 70 per cent were boys and 30 per cent girls in 2016.
- In 2015/2016 part-time special needs teaching provided mainly as general support was received by 22 per cent of pupils in basic education, i.e. 122 200 pupils.

### The number of pupils receiving special needs support is increasing slightly

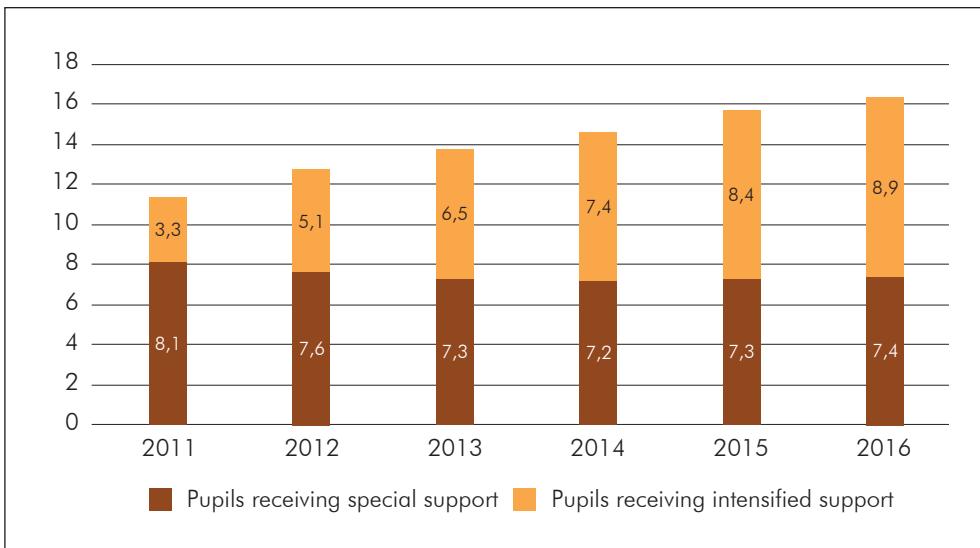
In 2016, the number of pupils receiving special needs support was 41 070, which amounts to 7.4 per cent of all pupils in basic education. A total of 49 500, or 8.9 per cent, of basic education pupils received intensified support. In 2016 altogether 65 per cent of pupils receiving intensified support were boys and 35 per cent girls. Out of those receiving special needs support, 70 per cent were boys and 30 per cent girls.

The majority of those receiving part-time special needs teaching receive it as general support. Part-time special needs teaching is, however, also provided to pupils receiving intensified or special support.

In 2016, 22 per cent of pupils in basic education, i.e. a total of 122 200 pupils, received part-time special needs support. The proportion of pupils receiving part-time special needs instruction out of all basic education pupils has increased slightly in the last three school years.

The share of pupils receiving special support has diminished slightly. Correspondingly, the share of intensified support, implemented as a new form of support in 2011, is growing. It would seem, thus, that one of the amendment would be attained, i.e. that earlier support would prevent the need for greater support.

In 2016, a total of 90 600 pupils received either intensified or special needs support, amounting to 16.3 per cent of all pupils in basic education.



**Figure 10.** Share of pupils receiving special or intensified support in 2011-2016

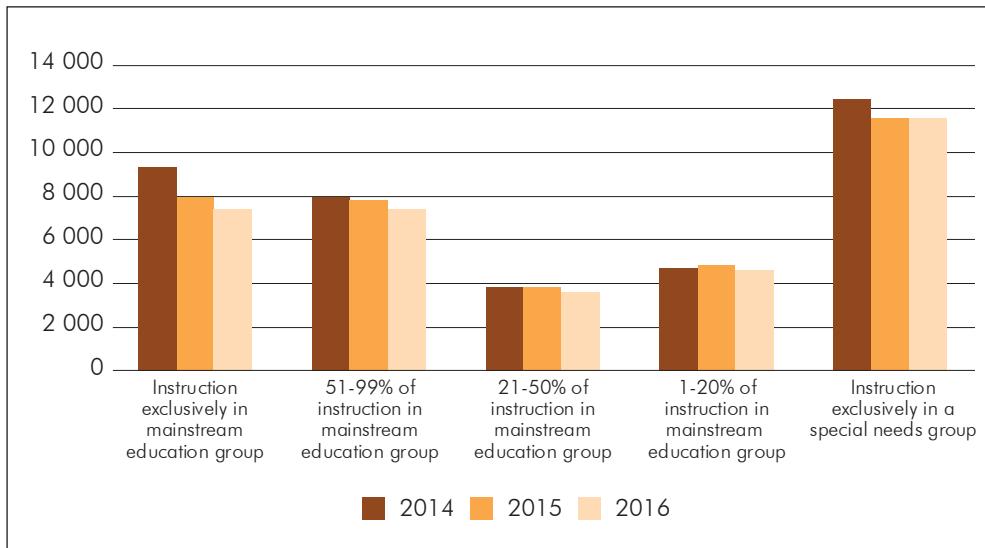
Statistics Finland – Vipunen – a statistical service of the education administration

Intensified and special needs support is more commonly provided to boys than girls. Of all boys ca 10.2 per cent received special support in 2016 and 11.3 per cent intensified support. The corresponding figure for girls was 4.5 per cent and 6.4 per cent.

Large regional differences can be detected in the numbers of pupils receiving intensified and special support. In the Åland Islands approximately 13 per cent receive intensified or special needs support, whereas in Kymenlaakso the share exceeds 22 per cent. The significant regional differences are probably partly due to the varying practices associated with the adoption of the forms of support that are still relatively new.

In 2016 almost 20 per cent of pupils receiving special needs support were taught exclusively in mainstream education groups and 38 per cent of special support

pupils were taught exclusively in special groups. The remaining 42 per cent of pupils receiving special support had been partially integrated into mainstream education groups. In the collection of statistical data, the level of integration is monitored as percentages of instruction time spent in mainstream education groups. These values are divided into three groups: 1-20 per cent, 21-50 per cent and 51-99 per cent of instruction time spent in mainstream education groups.



**Figure 11.** Pupils receiving special needs support according to location where the instruction is provided in 2014-2016

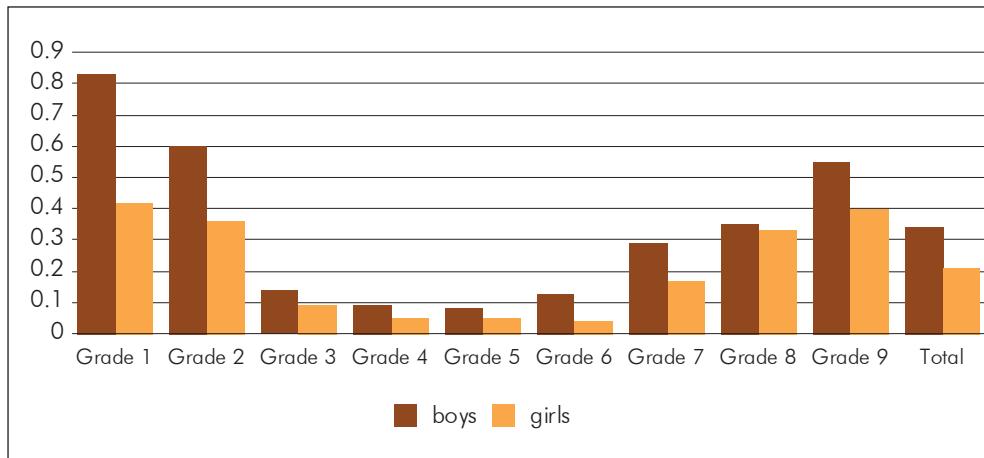
Statistics Finland – Vipunen – a statistical service of the education administration

In the last few years, the goal has been for more and more pupils receiving special needs support to receive instruction in mainstream education rather than in a special needs class. This is based on Finland's commitment to international agreements, programmes and declarations.

### 2.3.1 Supplementary support measures

- Repeating a grade is uncommon in Finland. Every year less than 0.3 per cent of pupils in basic education are retained in their current grade.
- Special measures, known as *etappi* activities, are organised to assist the more challenging pupils in need of support. In these activities, the pupils form groups, in which they study subjects and practice and work to strengthen their socio-emotional skills in a separate *etappi* classroom.
- In flexible education, known as JOPO activities, the aim is to support those youngsters who are in the danger of not getting the basic education certificate. In this activity the emphasis is based on multi-professional teamwork, in which schools, municipal youth-, social- and health sectors as well as upper secondary schools and workshops take part.
- Voluntary additional basic education (10th grade), the scope of which is one year or approximately 1 100 hours, can be organised for young people who have already completed their compulsory education.
- In 2016 approximately 500 young people continue in comprehensive school for one more year after completing their compulsory education.

It is also possible to support the school attendance of a pupil by retaining him or her in the current grade. This operating model is uncommon in Finland, as annually less than 0.3 per cent of pupils in basic education (approximately 1 500 pupils) repeat a grade. According the Basic Education Decree, pupils can be retained in their present grade if they have failed to, during their studies and in a separate test, complete the studies forming part of that grade in an acceptable manner. Despite having failed tests or courses, a pupil may still be promoted to the next grade, if so decided. The requirement is that the pupil can be estimated to be able to pass his or her studies in the next grade. A pupil may also be retained in a grade without having had failing performances if retention is to be considered appropriate from the perspective of the pupil's general academic success. The pupil may, for example, have received the grade "Adequate" in several subjects, and his or her basic knowledge and skills and learning capabilities may need strengthening before he or she is ready to be promoted to the next grade.



**Figure 12.** Shares of girls and boys of different ages retained in their current grade out of all pupils in comprehensive school in 2016

Statistics Finland – Vipunen – a statistical service of the education administration

Special measures are organised to assist the more challenging pupils in need of support. During an *etappi* period, the pupils's overall situation is assessed and the necessary support measures are planned and implemented by a multiprofessional team of experts. In these activities, the pupils form groups, in which they study subjects and practice and strengthen their socio-emotional skills in a separate group. The duration of a single period varies from pupil to pupil, but will generally be no more than a year. The attainment of objectives is assessed and monitored regularly throughout the period.

One year or 1 100 hours of voluntary additional basic education (10th grade) can be organised for young people who have already completed their compulsory education. In voluntary additional basic education, it is possible to study subjects in the syllabus of basic education according to the individual needs of each pupil. Voluntary additional basic education may also contain preparatory studies for vocational education and periods of work experience. Every year, approximately 500 young people continue in basic education for one more year after completing their compulsory education.

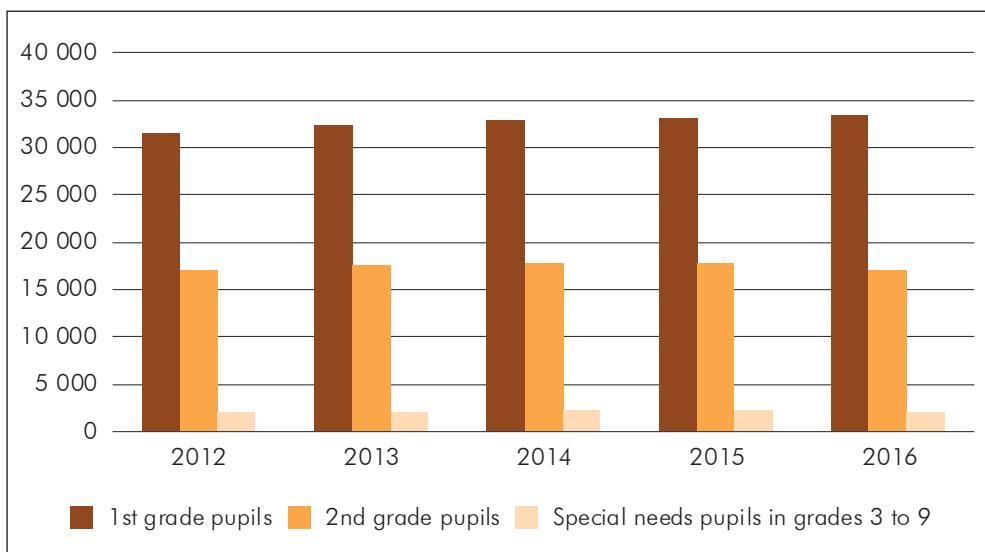
## 2.3.2 Morning and afternoon activities

- Morning and afternoon activities under the Basic Education Act are intended for 1st and 2nd grade pupils and for special needs pupils in all grades.
- Almost all Finnish municipalities organise morning and afternoon activities under the Basic Education Act.
- In 2016, more than half of first grade pupils took part in morning and afternoon activities in addition to their regular school work.
- In 2016, the cost of morning and afternoon activities under the Basic Education Act was on average 1 850 euro per pupil.
- A maximum fee of 60 to 80 euro per month can be charged for statutory morning and afternoon activities. However, the maximum monthly payment only applies to activities within the scope laid down in the Act (on average three hours per day). Municipalities also have the option to organise more activities and charge an additional fee for hours exceeding the number of hours cited in the Act.

In morning and afternoon activities, children are offered, before and after the school day, a safe environment where they, under the supervision of an adult possessing the necessary professional skills and suited to the task, can participate in diverse recreational activities. The objective is to offer the best possible support to balance the children's school attendance, the parents' work and the free time of families. The purpose of the activities is to support the growth and development of the child, to create a foundation for positive ways of spending free time and to help families carry out their educational task.

The morning and afternoon activities are intended for 1st and 2nd grade pupils and for special needs pupils in all grades. The responsibility for morning and afternoon activities lies with municipalities.

The number of pupils taking part in morning and afternoon activities under the Basic Education Act has increased gradually over the past few years. First grade pupils have the greatest need for morning and afternoon activities. In 2016, more than half of first grade pupils took part in morning and afternoon activities in addition to their regular school work.



**Figure 13.** Pupils participating in morning and afternoon activities in 2012-2016

Databases of the Finnish National Agency of Education

In 2016, the cost of morning and afternoon activities under the Basic Education Act was approximately 1 850 euro per pupil. In rural municipalities, the cost was slightly higher than the national average. Since 2013, the cost has come down 8 per cent.

### 2.3.3 Pupil welfare services

- The availability of pupil welfare personnel (school nurse, school physician, psychologist and school social workers) has improved in recent years.
- A school nurse is available in almost all Finnish schools.
- Regional differences exist in the availability of school physicians, psychologists and school social workers.
- In 2015, free school meals cost education providers an average of 2.8 euro per day per pupil. Efforts are made to offer school meals that follow the plate model.

Pupil welfare services are an essential element of the entity of promoting the welfare of pupils and supporting their educational attainment. They constitute a functional entity of several administrative sectors, with school health service

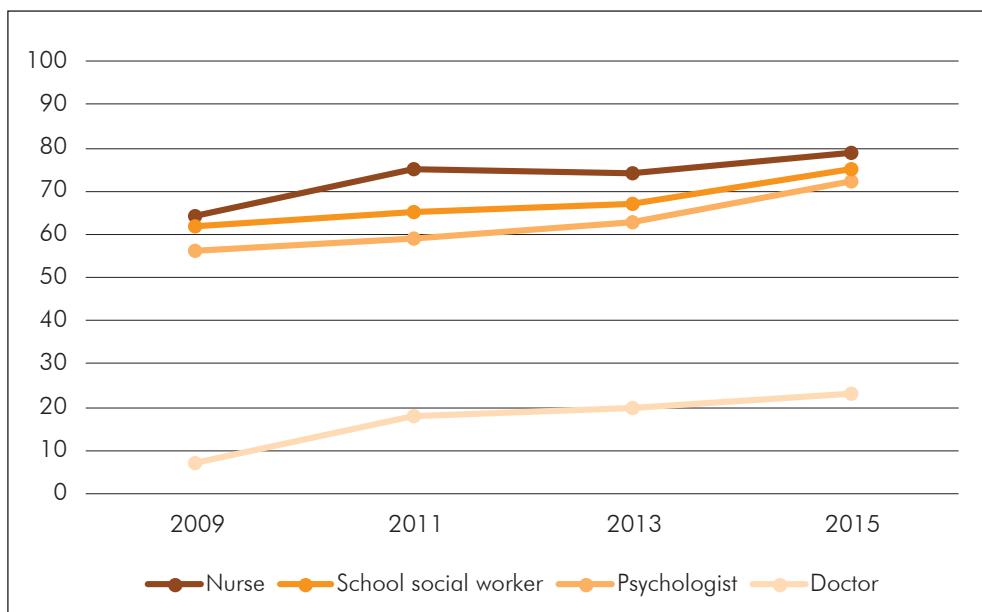
and the activities of school social workers and school psychologists as its central functions.

Schools and educational institutions must prepare a pupil welfare plan containing, for example, an estimate of the total need for pupil welfare services and an account of the pupil welfare services currently available. The plan shall describe the provision of pupil welfare services, the division of labour and responsibilities, cooperation, the targeting of the services as well as the organisation of community-oriented pupil welfare services and its operating methods in promoting the healthiness, safety and well-being of the school community and the school environment.

### **Health promotion work is proceeding in the desired direction**

The availability of pupil welfare personnel has improved in recent years. A school nurse is available in almost all Finnish schools. There are, however, deficiencies and vast regional differences in the availability of other pupil welfare personnel.

In basic education, the accessibility to student welfare services has improved in all surveyed fields, when looking at the results from 2009 to 2015.



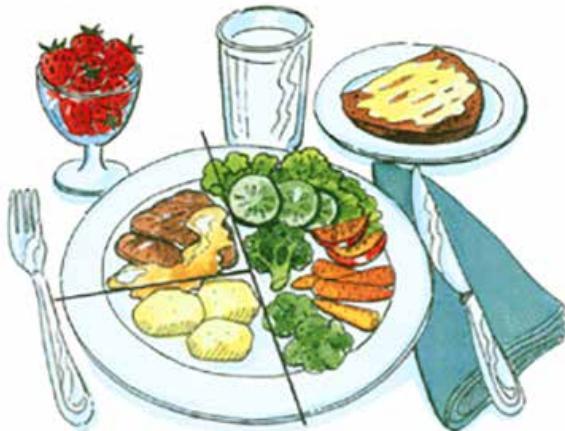
**Figure 14.** Availability of welfare services in basic education in Finland in 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015

Promotion of health in comprehensive schools 2015 data collection

## **Good quality school meals are an important element in the welfare of pupils**

In Finland, there is a long tradition of school meals. An act on the provision of free school meals was first enacted in 1943, and the year 1948 is considered to be the first year that free school meals were provided for schoolchildren. Under the Act, a school meal refers to a balanced, supervised and purposefully organised meal provided daily. A separate time, generally established as 30 minutes, must be reserved for the meal during the school day.

In Finland, the school meal is generally perceived to play an important role in the promotion of public health and good manners. School meals are constructed around the plate model, of which specific guidelines exist.



In 2015, the cost of a school meal was, on average, 2.8 euro per pupil. The cost of a school meal was the highest in small municipalities, where village schools have their own kitchens. The cost was the lowest in areas where the preparation of the meals was centralised.

# 3

## Cost of education

- In 2017 the share of education expenditure in the state budget is 12.3 per cent.
- Pre-primary and basic education are funded by the government and municipalities. The proportion financed by municipalities is approximately 75 per cent, and the share of the government is 25 per cent.
- The share of pre-primary and basic education in the funding directed by the government to education is approximately 40 per cent.
- The actual cost in 2015 was 8 800 euro per pupil.
- To ensure equal access to education, the government allocates increased central government transfers to municipalities based on special circumstances.
- [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Finland:Early\\_Childhood\\_and\\_School\\_Education\\_Funding](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Finland:Early_Childhood_and_School_Education_Funding)

Education is free for all pupils from pre-primary education to higher education. Municipalities are responsible for the provision of pre-primary and basic education to all residents of the municipality. Municipalities receive financial support from the government to produce certain basic services. One such basic service consists of pre-primary and basic education. Support from the government covers 25 per cent of the costs of pre-primary and basic education, and the municipalities themselves provide the remaining 75 per cent. Municipalities have the right to levy taxes, so they receive income for the funding of services e.g. from municipal tax paid by residents. The share of pre-primary and basic education in funding directed to education by the government is approximately 40 per cent.

## Central government transfers to local government

An average basic price for pre-primary and basic education is calculated annually based on actual costs from the previous year. Central government transfers to municipalities are determined by multiplying the basic price per pupil by the number of residents attending pre-primary and basic education, i.e. those aged from 6 to 15 years. Central government transfers to local government intended for the provision of basic services are non-assigned, i.e. the municipalities may decide on their use.

Differences between municipalities exist due to local circumstances. To smooth out the differences in circumstances, municipalities receive additional funding from the government on grounds such as the morbidity of residents, unemployment level in the municipality and the number of foreign-language speakers.

All municipalities also receive additional funding per pupil for basic education on the following grounds, among others:

- extended compulsory education
- voluntary additional basic education / 10th grade
- preparatory education for immigrants for basic education

Municipalities also can receive discretionary government transfers. Central government transfers to local government are assigned funding allocated for a certain purpose. These include aid allocated for example for promoting innovative learning environment and for the international activities of schools.

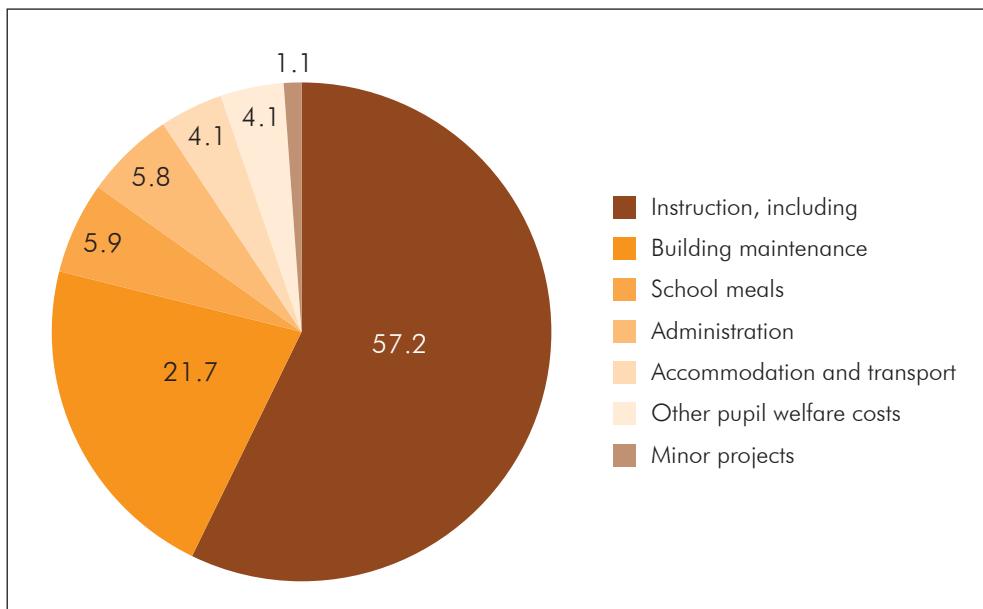
Finland has very few private schools. With a private school, the education provider is a party other than the municipality. The authorisation to provide education is granted by the ministry. Less than 3 per cent of each age cohort attend private schools.

In 2016 there are 66 private schools providing basic education, whereas the number of municipal schools is almost 2 430. Private schools are granted the same government funds as public schools. They are required to use the same admissions standards, the same national core curriculum and to provide the same services as public schools.

## Significant variation in the actual cost of basic education

The actual average cost of basic education in 2015 was 8 800 euro per pupil per year. The actual cost of basic education per pupil vary between municipalities. The cost per pupil ranges from 6 000 to 25 000 euro.

The costs of basic education are divided as follows:



**Figure 15.** The costs of basic education in 2015

Statistics Finland - Vipunen - statistical service of the education administration

Most of the funding is spent on the costs of instruction. Urban municipalities produced the services at a lower cost than rural municipalities.

### Pupils in basic education have the right to free school transport

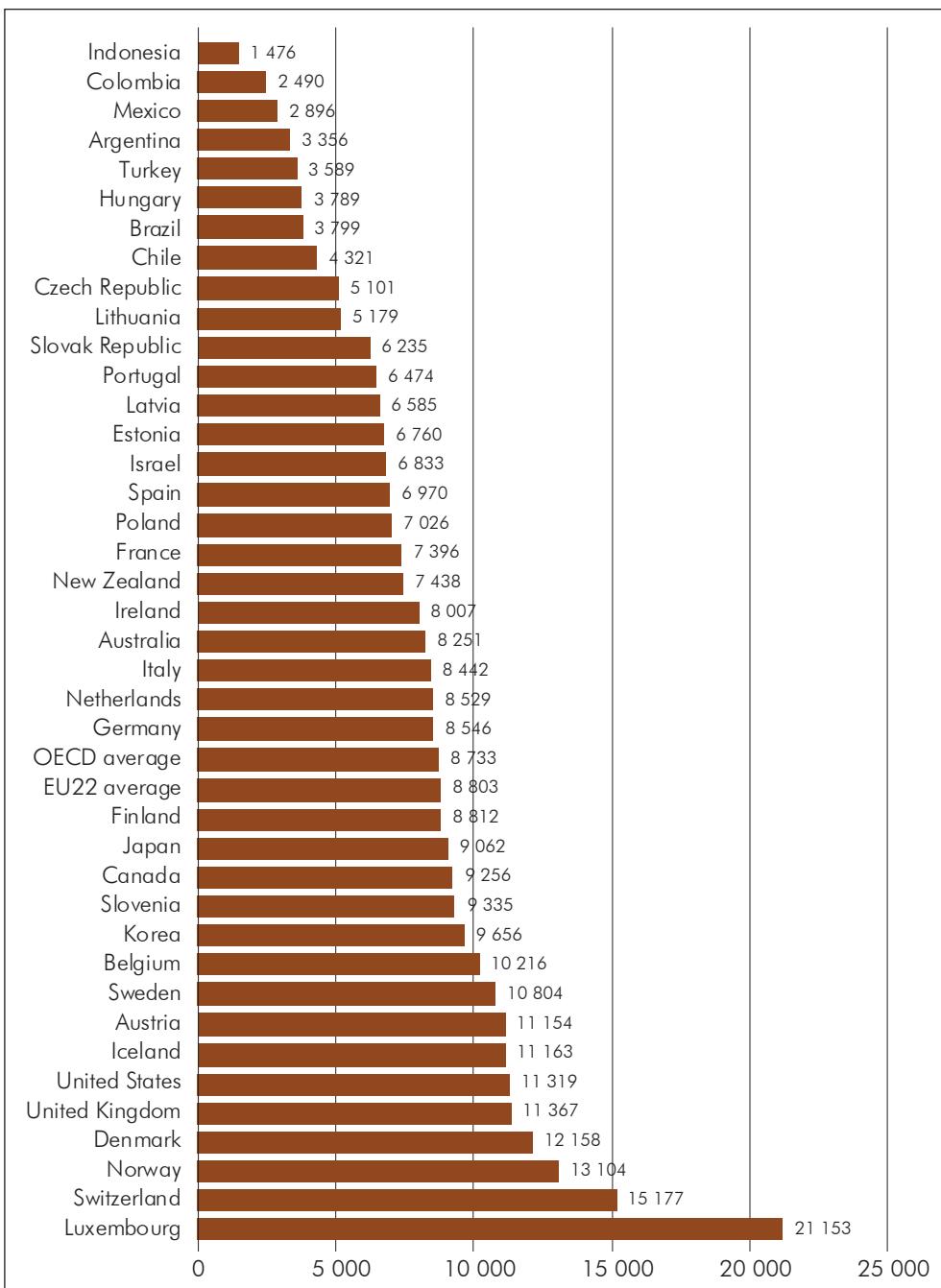
Finland is a sparsely populated country, where the distances between home and school can be long, particularly in the Eastern and Northern parts of the country. Pupils in basic education have a statutory right to free school transport. Pupils who live further than five kilometres from their school or whose journey to school can be deemed unsafe have a right to free school transport. In 2015 approximately 22 per cent of pupils in basic education received a school transport service.

## **Schools may decide on the use of their own funds**

Municipalities have the autonomy to decide on the funding for pre-primary and basic education. The size of municipalities and the number of schools within a municipality varies. Some municipalities have just one comprehensive school whereas, at most, a single municipality may contain 110 comprehensive schools. The arrangements for the funding on the level of municipalities vary. In some municipalities, schools are allocated a certain amount of funds for their activities and are independently responsible for their use, whereas in others the local authorities prepare a budget or financial plan for the schools. A recent trend has been increasing the schools' authority in decision making regarding the funding of school activities.

## **International comparison**

In an international comparison, the cost of primary education in Finland is slightly higher than the average compared to other EU and OECD countries. Expenditure in Finland is lowest among the Nordic countries.



**Figure 16.** Annual expenditure per student by educational institutions for all services (2014) (*Education at a Glance 2017*)

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