

Background material for ECNAIS seminar in Prague, 23-25/11/2017
prepared by selected ECNAIS member states (Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal,
Greece)
Theme: Inclusion in education
Finland

1. Background of the educational system – main facts which affect specific form and structure of the education system, local accessibility of education, structure of the founders of schools etc.

Finland is a country in northern Europe with a population of 5,5 million. Finland is officially bilingual; official languages are Finnish and Swedish. Ca 5,5% of Finnish citizens speak Swedish as their mother tongue. The Sámi-language has also a official status, but Sámi is only spoken in the northern parts of Finland; Lapland.

75% of Finns are evangelic-lutheran in religion. Practically Finland is fairly secularized.

Unemployment rate is 7,7% (July 2017)

Share of expenditure on education to GDP was 5,7% (2015)

Finland is divided in 19 regions, which all together comprise of 311 municipalities. At present the regions don't have a role in education. By law the municipalities have the obligation to arrange basic education for the children living in the municipality. Upper secondary education, vocational education and higher education are provided by municipalities, state, universities and private education providers.

Most of the basic education is provided by municipalities. Ca 2% of pupils of basic education goes to a comprehensive school run by non-municipal education provider; state subsidised private, university or state run schools.

All **education providers** are **independent legal entities** with the same rights and duties in educational tasks.

It is pretty difficult to get a permit to run a school in Finland.

The permit to give basic education or upper secondary education is granted by the Finnish government. Education providers with this permit receive a state subsidy per capita. In basic education the subsidy granted for the non-municipal education providers is 94% of the sum that is given to municipal education providers. On upper secondary level the sums are equal.

Type of school	The proportion of pupils in non-municipal schools in the total number of pupils in that type of school
pre-schools	1,4%
comprehensive schools	4,3%
upper secondary schools	12,4%

Types of schools	Number of schools	Number of pupils	Average number of pupils/school
pre-schools	773	10 904	14
comprehensive schools (basic education)	2431	536 394	221
upper secondary schools	396	104 028	263

In this presentation we concentrate only on basic education and upper secondary education.

2. Definition of the legal term “pupil with special educational needs” – do you have a legal definition? Which one? Does it include also gifted and extremely gifted pupils?

The fundamental value of the Core Curriculum is that every pupil is unique and has the right to high-quality education.

The Basic Education Act (1998/628) requires that “an enrolled pupil shall be entitled to teaching according to the curriculum, guidance counselling and sufficient support in learning and schoolgoing on school days directly as the need arises.” The Basic Education Act defines the legal term pupil with special educational needs in a very general way as “a pupil who has temporarily fallen behind in Studies” or “a pupil who has difficulties in learning or in schoolgoing”.

3. Basic principles and rules on which the education of pupils with special educational needs is built in your country – right to education, rights in education, structure and conditions of “support measures” provided to pupils with special educational needs, aspect of “best interests” of the pupil etc.

Everyone has the right to basic education free of charge. Provisions on the duty to receive education are laid down by an Act. The public authorities shall, as provided in more detail by an Act, guarantee for everyone equal opportunity to receive other educational services in accordance with their ability and special needs, as well as the opportunity to develop themselves without being prevented by economic hardship. The freedom of science, the arts and higher education is guaranteed. (Constitution of Finland, Section 16)

Equality is the basic principle in Finnish Education.

Every student is allocated a place in a nearby school, but they can also choose another school with some restrictions. Then the applicants shall be subject to equal selection criteria. This applies also to pupils with special needs.

The fundamental of Finnish education is that all people must have equal access to high-quality education. The same educational opportunities should be available to all citizens irrespective of their ethnic origin, gender, age, wealth or where they live. It’s very significant that in Finland education is free at all levels from pre-primary to higher education. Even school meals are free in pre-primary and basic education and at upper secondary schools as well. The Basic Education Act also defines that “a disabled child or a child with special educational needs has additionally the right to get the interpretation and assistance services he or she needs to participate in education, other educational services, special aids and the services ... free of charge.” Pupils are supported individually and the focus is on earliest possible support. The three levels of support are **1. general support 2. intensified / enhanced support and 3. special support.** Everyone is entitled to general support. It is a natural part of everyday teaching meaning high-quality education, guidance and support.

The Basic Education Act defines the Enhanced support (Amendment 642/2010):

1. A pupil who needs regular support in learning or schoolgoing shall be provided enhanced support in accordance with a learning plan devised for him or her. The learning plan must be prepared, unless there is an apparent reason not to do so, in collaboration with the pupil, the parent, carer or, where necessary, some other legal representative of the pupil.
2. The commencement and provision of enhanced support shall be determined multiprofessionally based on a pedagogical assessment in pupil welfare work ... The support to be provided for the pupil shall be recorded in the learning plan. The enhanced support shall be provided qualitatively and quantitatively in a manner appropriate for the pupil's level of development and individual needs.

The Basic Education Act defines the Special-needs support (Amendment 642/2010):

1. Special-needs support consists of special-needs education and other support provided under this Act. Special-needs education is provided, allowing for the pupil's interests and the facilities for providing the education, in conjunction with other instruction or partly or totally in a special-needs classroom or some other appropriate facility.
2. **The education provider shall make a written decision for the provision of special-needs support, which is reviewed at least after the second year-class and before transfer to the seventh year-class.** The decision on special-needs support shall determine the pupil's primary teaching group, possible interpretation and assistant services ... and exceptional teaching arrangements referred to in subsection 1 above.
3. **Before the decision on the special-needs support is made, the education provider shall hear the pupil and his or her parent, carer or legal representative** in accordance with the provisions of Section 34 of the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003) and obtain a report on the pupil's progress in learning and an account of the enhanced support given to the pupil and the pupil's overall situation which has been prepared in multiprofessional pupil welfare cooperation and, based on these, undertake an assessment on the need for special-needs support (pedagogical examination). The pedagogical examination shall be supplemented by a psychological or medical opinion or a corresponding social assessment.
4. The decision on special-needs support may be made before the start of pre-primary or basic education or during pre-primary or basic education without a prior pedagogical examination and enhanced support if it is evident based on a psychological or medical examination that the pupil cannot be taught otherwise owing to a disability, illness, delayed

development or emotional dysfunction or some other corresponding reason.

5. **Where an education provider other than the local authority does not provide the support referred to in subsection 1, the decision on special-needs support to be provided for the pupil shall be made by the local authority of the pupil's home municipality on the proposal of the education provider.**
6. Provisions on the formation of teaching groups containing one or more pupils who have a decision on special-needs support or who are within prolonged compulsory schooling shall be enacted by Government Decree.

4. Special schools – their existence, target groups, conditions for admission, founders; if special schools do not exist - a description of the education system for pupils with the most severe forms of handicaps

The ideology of special needs education is the philosophy of inclusion. **Nearly half of pupils with special educational needs are integrated either totally or partially into mainstream education and others are taught in special groups in ordinary schools or in special schools.** Every student is allocated a place in a nearby school, but they can also choose another school with some restrictions. Since 2010 Finnish School reform a growing number of special-needs pupils are studying in their neighbourhood schools and in ordinary teaching groups.

Special needs education is provided as well in mainstream school system as in special groups in ordinary schools or in special schools. **If the assessment of the situation indicates that the pupil's support needs are particularly demanding and it is impossible to provide education at the nearest school, education must be provided where it can be done to the benefit of the pupil.** Demanding special education is organised in several places: in ordinary comprehensive schools, hospital schools, special schools and approved schools run by either government or private sector or commune. Altogether we have about 10000 demanding special education students.

Year 2015 Finland had 2397 basic education schools and 85 of them were special schools. 4700 of 526 800 (less than 1 per cent of pupils) basic education pupils were studying in special schools. (Statistics Finland).

<p>5. Financing of the system of education of pupils with special educational needs - <i>how the system takes financially into consideration a pupil with special educational needs and his demands, both in a mainstream school and in a special school</i></p>	<p>All non-municipal education providers get a per capita subsidy from the state according the number of pupils or students.</p> <p>This subsidy covers all the functions the education provider is bound to offer: tuition, books and accessories, school lunch, special education, student welfare (nurse, psychologist, social worker, etc) and maintenance of school buildings.</p> <p>There is no extra subsidy for special education in mainstream schools.</p> <p>Special schools, i.e hospital schools receive their own subsidy, which covers the extended care of the pupil.</p>
<p>6. The legal role of parents in educating their children with special educational needs - <i>How is the parent's right to choose a child's educational path implemented? What are possible solutions in case of conflict of parental and professional opinion in a concrete situation?</i></p>	<p>Education shall be organized in cooperation with guardians, ensuring that each pupil receives instruction, guidance and support indicated by their level of needs. Cooperation between home and school becomes more significant when pupils have special needs. The guardians work in cooperation with professionals to record the objectives and measures to guidance pupil's education in the pupil's learning plan or the individual education plan [IEP]. (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014)</p> <p>The guardians are informed of pupils' daily school life and the possibilities of receiving support. The pupil or the guardian may not refuse to accept support prescribed in the Basic Education Act.</p>
<p>7. Role of non-public schools in education of pupils with special educational needs</p>	<p>There is no difference between public or non-public schools regarding education of pupils with special needs. Government funding in basic education is the nearly the same, laws and regulations are exactly the same for all education providers.</p>
<p>8. Current issues and discussions you are facing in this area in your country</p>	<p>One of the biggest concerns is decreasing public funding. A lot of special schools have been abolished in recent years. Inclusion is the name of the game. Special education is mainly given as part of ordinary education system. One of the biggest aims is, of course, to cut costs. It is obvious that teaching in small groups of special education is much more expensive than teaching in</p>

	<p>ordinary classes.</p> <p>The big issue is: how to maintain high-quality education with decreasing resources?</p>
<p>9. Topics and themes you suggest to discuss at Ecnais Seminar in Prague, November 2017</p>	<p>What are the resources in special education at other countries?</p> <p>How different countries carry out inclusion in their education systems or special education systems?</p> <p>What kind of attitudes do the professionals or public have towards inclusion in your country?</p>
<p>10. Contact person for further information</p>	<p>Markku Moisala Yksityiskoulujen Liitto ry email: markku.moisala@lyk.fi</p>

Comments of preparatory team and answers on supplementary questions

1. Concept of equality and non-selectivity

Finnish educational system is based on broad concept of equality and non-selectivity. It seems that most of regular schools are prepared to educate pupils with all range of special educational needs (on inclusive principle in regular classes or in special classes). **It is interesting that the system of funding is based on the principle of lump-sum per pupil, without any increased money per a pupil with special educational needs (with increased financial demands on his / her education - lower number of pupils in the class, teacher assistant, pedagogical intervention, special teaching aids, etc.).**

Does really standard state (or public in general) funding allow all schools to finance increased spending on the education of pupils with special educational needs? Are there are any standards (material or personnel) that each regular school has to fulfil in order to realize the right to educate pupils with all types of special educational needs, that means whether the real situation (personnel and material) in most of schools is similar.

Yes, this is the case. Financing is equal to all education providers. The education provider has the responsibility to provide also the special education (three-level-support) when needed, according to pupil's needs.

2. Partially limited right of decision-making of parents in the process of education of their child:

The background material shows that the parent's right to choose "non-neighbourhood" school is partially limited (how specifically)? At the same time, it is stipulated that the parent does not have the right to refuse the support prescribed by the Education Act (at three levels of support). Does this restriction also apply to the eventual transfer of a pupil to a special class within a regular school or a separate special school when it is indicated that "*pupil's support needs are particularly demanding and it is impossible to provide education at the nearest school*"? Must (as in Portugal), prevent the possible admission of a pupil to a special school, education in a regular school and his "failure" (for example in case of pupils with severe mental disabilities, highly functional autism, etc.)

Parents have the right to apply for a place in “non-neighbourhood school”. This school may, however inform that there are no vacant places to fill. In Finland the parents are not forced to move their child to another (e.G special-) school, even if it would be the best option for the child. Usually the parents recognize the good of for their child and promote the schooltransfer.