

Finnish-language basic education / lower stage comprehensive school, i.e. grades 1–6

1. National Core Curriculum (OPS) and Helsinki's curriculum

The National Core Curriculum (OPS) is a regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education that guides operations and education at all schools in Finland. In other words, all schools in Finland mostly teach the same things in accordance with the same principles. Schools are allowed to decide some things for themselves. The purpose of the National Core Curriculum is to ensure that the education provided at all schools in Finland is of equal high quality and that this education provides all pupils with the same opportunities.

Based on the National Core Curriculum, cities, municipalities and schools prepare their own curricula. The City of Helsinki also has its own curriculum, which is followed by the schools in Helsinki.

This brochure briefly describes the key content of Helsinki's curriculum for basic education. More detailed and comprehensive information on [Helsinki's curriculum](https://ops.edu.hel.fi) is available to everyone online at <https://ops.edu.hel.fi> (in Finnish).

2. Content of Helsinki's curriculum for basic education

The curriculum lays down things such as:

- the school subjects taught and their objectives and content (on a general level)
The content and objectives have been defined for each subject and grade separately.
- the principles of assessing pupils' competence
- the forms of support offered for pupils.

3. School subjects in grades 1–6

In lower stage comprehensive school, i.e. grades 1–6, pupils study the following 13 common subjects:

- mother tongue (ÄI/SU) or Finnish as a second language (S2)
- A1 language (such as English EN)
- B1 language (such as Swedish RU)
- mathematics (MA)
- environmental studies (YM)

Environmental studies is a school subject only studied in lower stage comprehensive school. It combines biology, geography, health education, physics and chemistry.

- religion or ethics (UE/UO/UI/ET)
- history (HI) and social studies (YH)
- artistic and practical subjects: music (MU), visual arts (KU), crafts (KS), physical education (LI), home economics (KO).

Electives: Schools also teach **electives**, which are applied courses on different school subjects or courses that combine content from many school subjects. Pupils can choose for themselves which electives to study. Different schools offer a slightly different variety of elective courses.

Multidisciplinary modules: Every year, pupils also study **multidisciplinary modules**. Multidisciplinary modules familiarise pupils with various phenomena and combine knowledge drawn from different school subjects. At the schools in Helsinki, pupils study a minimum of two multidisciplinary modules per year. Every school decides for themselves the exact content of their multidisciplinary modules.

Transversal competencies: In addition to the content of each school subject, Finnish schools take **transversal competencies** into account in their teaching. Transversal competencies are knowledge and skills areas that do not form their own school subject; instead, the intention is for them to be studied during the lessons of all school subjects. Transversal competencies include learning to learn and cultural competence, for example.

4. Language studies

Compulsory languages: All pupils study Finnish at comprehensive schools. The school subject 'Mother tongue and literature' includes three different syllabi: Finnish (S1), Sign Language and Finnish as a second language (S2). Immigrants can be taught Finnish in accordance with the syllabus for either Finnish (S1) or Finnish as a second language (S2). The syllabus is chosen by the pupil's parents.

In addition to Finnish or Finnish as a second language, pupils study at least two other languages. Pupils study the advanced syllabus in a foreign language (A1 language) throughout grades 1–9, i.e. throughout their basic education. In the 6th grade, pupils start studying a B1 language, which is usually the second national language, i.e. Swedish.

Free-choice and elective language studies: In addition to the compulsory languages, pupils may choose one free-choice language (A2) in lower stage comprehensive school and one elective language (B2) in upper stage comprehensive school.

Mother tongue studies: Helsinki offers mother tongue studies in several different languages. These studies are provided in addition to other education, and they do not replace lessons in any other school subject. The parents decide whether their child will participate in mother tongue studies.

5. Assessment of learning

According to the curriculum, assessment of learning must be versatile and equal. The subject of assessment is the pupil's learning and competence level. Teachers assess how well the pupil has reached the objectives set for their own grade (1–9) in each school subject.

At the end of every school year, the competence of pupils in different school subjects is assessed and graded for each subject. In grades 1–3, pupils are given a verbal assessment. In grades 4–6, they are given a number grade. A separate grade is not given for multidisciplinary modules and transversal competencies.

At the end of the school year, pupils are presented with a school year report that lists their grades. Schools can also present intermediate reports if they wish. Additionally, a learning discussion attended by the pupil and their guardian and teacher is held at least once a year in every grade.

Finnish-language basic education / grades 7–9 (upper stage comprehensive school)

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Based on the National Core Curriculum, cities, municipalities and schools prepare their own curricula. The City of Helsinki also has its own curriculum, which is followed by the schools in Helsinki.

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2. Content of Helsinki's curriculum for basic education

The curriculum lays down things such as:

- the school subjects taught and their objectives and content (on a general level)
The content and objectives have been defined for each subject and grade separately.
- the principles of assessing pupils' competence
- the forms of support offered for pupils.

3. School subjects in grades 7–9

In upper stage comprehensive school, i.e. grades 7–9, pupils study the following 18 common subjects:

- mother tongue or Finnish as a second language (ÄI/SU/S2)
- A1 language (such as English EN)
- B1 language (such as Swedish RU)
- mathematics (MA)
- biology (BI) and geography (GE)
- chemistry (KE) and physics (FY)
- health education (TT)
- religion or ethics (UE/UO/UI/UR/UK/UB/ET)
- history (HI) and social studies (YH)
- artistic and practical subjects: music (MU), visual arts (KU), crafts (KS), physical education (LI), home economics (KO)
- guidance counselling (OP).

Electives: Schools also teach **electives**, which are applied courses on different school subjects or courses that combine content from many school subjects. Music, visual arts, crafts and home economics are compulsory subjects only in the 7th grade and offered as electives in the 8th and 9th grades. Pupils can choose for themselves which electives to study. Different schools offer a slightly different variety of elective courses.

Multidisciplinary modules: Every year, pupils also study **multidisciplinary modules**. Multidisciplinary modules familiarise pupils with various phenomena and combine knowledge drawn from different school subjects. At the schools in Helsinki, pupils study a minimum of two multidisciplinary modules per year. Every school decides for themselves the exact content of their multidisciplinary modules.

Transversal competencies: In addition to the content of each school subject, Finnish schools take **transversal competencies** into account in their teaching. Transversal competencies are knowledge and skills areas that do not form their own school subject; instead, the intention is for them to be studied during the lessons of all school subjects. Transversal competencies include cultural competence and working life competence, for example.

4. Language studies

Compulsory languages: All pupils study Finnish at comprehensive schools. The school subject 'Mother tongue and literature' includes three different syllabi: Finnish (S1), Sign Language and Finnish as a second language (S2). Immigrants can be taught Finnish in accordance with the syllabus for either Finnish (S1) or Finnish as a second language (S2). The syllabus is chosen by the pupil's parents.

In addition to Finnish or Finnish as a second language, pupils study at least two other languages. Pupils study the advanced syllabus in a foreign language (A1 language) throughout grades 1–9, i.e. throughout their basic education. In the 6th grade, pupils start studying a B1 language, which is usually Swedish.

Free-choice and elective language studies: In addition to the compulsory languages, pupils may choose one free-choice language (A2) in lower stage comprehensive school and one elective language (B2) in upper stage comprehensive school.

Mother tongue studies: Helsinki offers mother tongue studies in several different languages. These studies are provided in addition to other education, and they do not replace lessons in any other school subject. The parents decide whether their child will participate in mother tongue studies.

5. Assessment of learning

According to the curriculum, assessment of learning must be versatile and equal. The subject of assessment is the pupil's learning and competence level. Teachers assess how well the pupil has reached the objectives set for their own grade (1–9) in each school subject.

At the end of every school year, the competence of pupils in different school subjects is assessed and graded for each subject. In grades 4–9, the assessment is presented on a scale of 4 to 10. A separate grade is not given for multidisciplinary modules and transversal competencies. At the end of the school year, pupils are presented with a school year report that lists their grades. Schools can also present intermediate reports if they wish. Additionally, a learning discussion attended by the pupil and their parents and teacher is held at least once a year in every grade.