

Special Educational Support

To promote the learners' healthy growth and development, education is provided according to their age and capabilities. Learning and social well-being are promoted through safe school environment, social and psychological support and health care. Early identification of learning difficulties and sufficient support are cornerstones of education.



General educational support for all pupils includes guidance and counselling, social welfare services, cooperation between home and school, the use of the learning plan, and remedial teaching.

General support for studies is provided equally to all pupils, but schools must be prepared to focus support flexibly to address the special needs of individuals. Co-operation between pre-primary education and basic education and between basic education and upper secondary education is an important part of the work that supports education. Issues concerning the provision of guidance and counselling services, studying, pupil welfare services, and support services are to be explained to pupils and their parents or guardians.

In addition to organising instruction, each local authority is generally responsible for social welfare services for pupils and students. A local authority must, in certain circumstances, organise such services as transportation for pupils who need it. Pupils in basic education living some distance from school (more than 5 km) or the journey is considered dangerous are entitled to free transport. Welfare services also include free school meals, school health care, dental care as well as the services of student welfare officers and school psychologists.

The **national core curriculum** is determined by the Finnish National Board of Education. It includes, besides the objectives, core contents of different subjects and the principles of pupil assessment, provisions on **special needs education, pupil welfare and educational guidance.**

Each pupil of compulsory school age has the right to receive remedial instruction and special needs education, where necessary. Special needs education is provided primarily through inclusion into mainstream education. If learning difficulties are minor, special needs education is provided as part-time special needs education in conjunction with mainstream instruction.

If a child cannot cope in mainstream education due to disability, illness, delayed development, emotional disorder or some other similar reason, she/he may be admitted to special education during pre-primary education and upon commencement of compulsory education or s/he may also be transferred to special education later during comprehensive school. In such cases, special needs education may also be provided in a special group, class or school.

Guidance and counselling

Guidance and counselling activities form an important support for studies, and arrangements for an introduction to working life. Guidance and counselling activities are to constitute a continuum lasting the duration of basic education. The fact, that teachers participating in the guidance work together with study counsellors guarantees that pupils get guidance and counselling services during their studies and in transition phases of the study path.

It is the task of all teachers to guide pupils in their study, to help them develop learning skills and capabilities, and to prevent the emergence of study-related problems. It is the task of every teacher to support the pupils' personal growth, development, and participation.

In addition to preventive activities, guidance and counselling implemented at the school should especially support those pupils who have difficulties with studying or who are in danger of dropping out.

Remedial instruction

Remedial instruction is a form of **differentiation of teaching characterised by individualised tasks, individualised use of time, and guidance and counselling**. Remedial teaching is to be commenced as soon as learning difficulties are observed, so that the pupil does not lag behind in his or her studies. Before the pupil is judged to be doing poorly in the subject or subject group, he or she must have the chance to participate in remedial teaching.

The teacher takes the primary initiative regarding remedial teaching. An attempt is to be made to arrange for remedial teaching as a matter of mutual understanding with the pupil's parents or guardians, and they are to be informed about how the instruction is to be provided.

Remedial teaching is to be provided as often and as broadly as is appropriate from the standpoint of the pupil's academic success. The instruction is given either during lessons conforming to the pupil's schedule, or outside of those lessons.

Special needs education

The Finnish approach to special needs education has undergone four phases; (i) instruction for pupils with sensory disabilities, as a result of which many disabled children were excluded from school; (ii) care for the disabled, medical care and rehabilitation, which led to segregation of children into homogenous groups; (iii) the principle of normalisation and integration; and (iv) educational equality and equal educational services.

Pupils are given various forms of help, the nature of which is determined according to the special need. A key factor is the **early recognition of learning difficulties and problems**. Support should be provided immediately if educational or student welfare professionals, or the pupil's parents, identify risks in the pupil's development and ability to learn. **Disabilities, illnesses or handicaps can cause obstacles to learning**, as they impair the child's growth, development and ability to learn. Social or emotional problems can also result in the need for special needs education.

A psychological, medical or social examination of a pupil and his/her growth environment may be conducted as early as during early childhood education and care and also, where necessary, later during pre-primary and basic education. In addition it is possible to obtain statements from different therapists (such as occupational therapists, speech therapists or physiotherapists), other experts (psychologists,

doctors) and the child's teachers (such as a special needs teacher specialising in speech, reading and writing).

Provision, basic education

The objective of special needs education is to help and support pupils in such a way as to give them equal opportunities to complete compulsory schooling in accordance with their abilities and alongside their peers.

The first alternative for providing special needs education is to include pupils with special education needs in mainstream classes and, when necessary, provide special needs education in small teaching groups.

Students may receive part-time special needs education by a special needs education teacher if they have minor difficulties in learning or adjustment. The student may have an individual learning plan if required. The individual study plan includes a plan on arranging education, whether it is **integrated, partly integrated or a special class**, the goals, contents, support and principles of assessment. The student may complete his or her studies following the general or an adjusted syllabus, in one or more subjects. Consequently pupil assessment will be based on the criteria of the general syllabus or an individual education plan.

Only when this is not feasible is the **second alternative** considered: **the provision of special needs education in a special group, class or school**. The reason for the transfer can be one or more learning disabilities, handicap, illness, delayed development, emotional disorder or other comparable reasons.

An official decision needs to be made if a student is transferred to special needs education. The decision is based on a statement by a psychological, medical or social welfare professional, with the mandatory hearing of the guardians. The statement is required to take into account the possible retransfer to general instruction.

The decision on the transfer to special needs education is made by the school board of the pupil's municipality of residence. According to the Basic Education Act, admission or transfer of pupils to special needs education always require consultation with the parents or other guardians. Where the decision on transfers to special needs education is made against the consent of a parent or guardian, the parent or guardian may appeal against the decision to the Provincial State Office.

Each pupil admitted or transferred to special education is to be provided with **an individual education plan** (IEP), which is based on the curriculum and enables individualisation of the general syllabus.

Provision, beyond basic education

Students in need of special support may apply to ordinary vocational institutions within the national joint application system or through the related flexible application procedure. They may also apply to educational institutions with special educational tasks directly or, in some cases, through the joint application system. Pupil counsellors in basic education and student counsellors in vocational education and training aim to find a suitable place for each student according to the student's wishes.

In vocational education and training, students with special educational needs are integrated in the mainstream education if possible, or in special needs groups or both. In the case of students with severe disabilities, vocational special education institutions provide training and rehabilitative instruction and guidance. Vocational special needs education can be also provided through apprenticeship training

In vocational education and training, students in need of special educational or student welfare services are provided with instruction in the form of special needs education and training. An **individual education plan** (IEP) is to be drawn up for each student receiving special needs education and training. This plan must set out details of the qualification to be completed, the national core curriculum or the requirements of the competence-based qualification observed in education and training, the scope of the qualification, the individual curriculum drawn up for the student, grounds for providing special needs education and training, special educational and student welfare services required for studying as well as other services and support measures provided for the student.

Each education provider is responsible for organising special needs education and training and services for students in special needs education and training.

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