

Helsinki

Options for basic education in Helsinki

Guide for international families





Welcome to Helsinki, the world's most impactful place to learn!

The Finnish education system is renowned for producing great results, with little disparity between schools. In Helsinki, all pupils have the chance to get high-quality basic education in their local school. For pupils interested in arts, sciences and sports, for instance, Helsinki has schools that offer special emphasis on a number of subjects in several locations around the city. If you are interested in studying in different languages, Helsinki offers a wide range of options, which we introduce in detail later in this guide. If you have just arrived to Finland with no prior Finnish or Swedish skills, we will help you learn the new language in our preparatory education classes.

No matter where you choose to study, we strive to serve your individual needs and help you find your strengths. Our aim is to provide you

with all the knowledge and skills that you need in your future studies, working life and the rapidly changing world.

We hope that this guide gives you and your family lots of useful information about basic education options in Helsinki. We encourage all parents and guardians to actively communicate and cooperate with our schools, as we find it the key to a smooth learning path. We are here for you every step of the way, and we hope you and your family enjoy your time in Helsinki.

Best wishes,

Outi Salo
Head of Basic Education
Education Division
City of Helsinki

Contents

- 3 Welcome to Helsinki, the world's most impactful place to learn!
- 4 10 Facts about basic education in Helsinki
- 6 Your options at a glance
- 9 Local school
- 10 Preparatory education
- 12 Basic education in English
- 15 Bilingual education
- 16 Swedish-language immersion
- 18 Other alternatives
- 19 Get in touch



10 Facts about basic education in Helsinki

1 In Finland, everybody has a constitutional right to basic education free of charge.

2 Basic education is compulsory for all children living permanently in Finland. It starts in the year a child turns seven. Before the beginning of basic education, children must attend one year of pre-primary education in the year they turn six.

3 In some cases, children can start school a year before or after the year when they turn seven. However, this requires an expert opinion and an official decision to make sure that it is the best solution for the child.

4 Basic education covers grades 1-9. Until recently, compulsory schooling has ended after finishing basic education (or when a person turns 17). As of August 2021, compulsory schooling will be extended to the age of 18, which means that young people will have to move on to study in upper secondary education.

5 City of Helsinki offers all residents a place in Finnish-language or Swedish-language basic education at their local school.

6 Children and young people with no previous Finnish or Swedish skills are offered a place in preparatory education to help them acquire basic skills in one of the national languages.

7 Pupils whose mother tongue is not Finnish or Swedish can also participate in additional mother tongue instruction in their own language, or in a language they have acquired while living in another country.

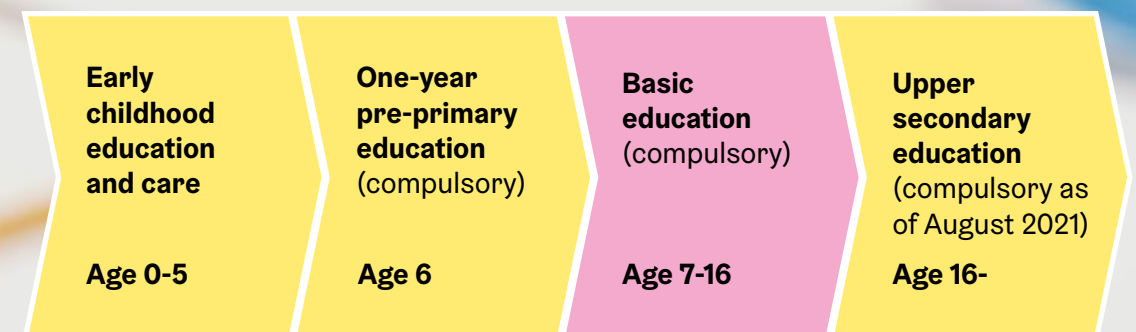
8 In addition to basic education taught in Finnish and Swedish, schools in Helsinki offer basic education in several different languages, with instruction either completely in the target language or as bilingual education.

9 Most schools in Helsinki are municipal, which means that they are run by the City of Helsinki. In addition to this, there are some privately run schools that cooperate with the City of Helsinki. These schools serve as local schools for pupils living in their area, and they all follow the same policies regarding admissions.

10 There is also a handful of private and state-owned schools in Helsinki that operate independently. Most of these schools serve the needs of a particular language group, or have a special pedagogical or religious mission. These schools follow their own policies concerning admissions and fees.



Education system in Finland (simplified version)



Your options at a glance

Schools run by the City of Helsinki

Local school

Studying in Finnish or Swedish in a regular classroom in a school close to your home.

► More information on page 9

Preparatory education

Learning the Finnish or Swedish language and getting familiar with everyday life in a Finnish school.

► More information on page 10

Basic education in English

Studying entirely in English.

► More information on page 12

Bilingual education

Studying partly in Finnish and partly in the target language (Chinese, English, Estonian, North Sami, Russian or Spanish).

► More information on page 15

Other alternatives

Private and state-owned schools

There are several private and state-owned schools in Helsinki that offer instruction in different languages.

► More information on page 18

Home-schooling

In home-schooling, a parent or guardian is responsible for ensuring that you meet the set goals of comprehensive education.

► More information on page 19





Local school

In Finland, you will automatically have a place in a school in your own neighbourhood. It is not necessarily the closest one to your home, as Helsinki is divided into school admission areas. Your school is assigned to you based on your home address, and you can find out what your school is by entering your address in the search box on the Helsinki Service Map website at servicemap.hel.fi.

Instruction in your local school is either in Finnish or in Swedish, and you need to be proficient in the language of instruction when you enrol in the school. Don't worry if you don't know Finnish or Swedish yet – if this is the case, you can enrol in what we call preparatory education. Preparatory education helps you learn the language and proceed in your studies at the same time (see page 10).

If you already know Finnish or Swedish and want to enrol in your local school, just contact the school directly. You can also apply for a place in a school other than the one assigned to you, but they can only admit you if they have free places. Contact the school directly to ask about their availability.

Some schools specialise in certain subjects, such as arts or sports. To enrol in these 'weighted-curriculum' classes, you need to take an aptitude test, and admission policies vary between schools. If you are interested in these options, check the school websites for more information.

If your mother tongue or the language you speak at home is not Finnish or Swedish, or if you have acquired another language through other means such as living abroad, you can participate in additional instruction in that language. It is optional, and the weekly amount of instruction is two lessons. The aim of this instruction is to help you maintain and develop your skills in that language. These classes are offered in more than 40 languages, based on demand. Not all languages are offered in all schools, and you may have to travel to another school for this instruction.

Read more:

- ▶ Weighted-curriculum education: hel.fi/weighted
- ▶ Mother tongue studies: hel.fi/mother-tongue

Preparatory education

If you don't know any Finnish or Swedish yet, preparatory education is the place for you. Learning Finnish or Swedish will help you a lot in your everyday life in Finland, and it multiplies your study options after basic education. If you are planning to stay in Finland for a longer time, knowing Finnish will be an asset in working life.

How does it work?

In preparatory education, the focus is on learning Finnish or Swedish and getting to know the Finnish school system. However, preparatory education is not just Finnish or Swedish language classes; you also study other subjects and learn the language on the side. In addition to that, you get a chance to attend regular classes with Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking pupils as soon as you know a little Finnish or Swedish. You follow a personal study plan based on your needs, previous studies and skills.

You can study in preparatory education for up to 12 months. If your language skills develop quickly, you can switch to a regular classroom earlier. After preparatory education, you will move on to study in a regular Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking classroom. The aim is that you

transfer to a group that matches your age and skills in the Finnish education system. Preparatory education does not mean that you fall behind in your studies.

In grades 1-2 (age 7-8), preparatory education takes place in the same classroom with Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking children in your local school, with the school staff supporting your language learning. After the maximum of 12 months in preparatory education, you will continue your studies in Finnish or in Swedish. To enrol in grades 1 and 2, just contact your local school directly.

In grades 3-9 (age 9-16), Finnish-speaking preparatory education takes place in separate groups that are available in several schools around the city. We try to find you a place in a preparatory education class as close to your home as possible. To enrol in grades 3-9, you should send an enrolment form to the Education Division.

If you want to attend preparatory education in Swedish, contact the Swedish-speaking school directly.

Read more:

- Preparatory education: hel.fi/preparatory



Basic education in English

Basic education in English means studying (almost) entirely in English. In all schools, you have to study some Finnish language and literature, and those studies are conducted in Finnish. You can study Finnish as a mother tongue or as a second or foreign language, depending on your skills in the language. Prior Finnish skills are not required, with the exception of eight-graders and ninth-graders, who should have basic command of spoken Finnish when applying.

Who is it for?

English-language education is a good option for you if you want to study entirely in English, have studied in English before, or are perhaps planning to stay in Helsinki only for a while. Your English skills should be of native or near-native level, and you need to pass an aptitude test that measures your English skills. English-language education has a limited availability of places, and sometimes there are more eligible applicants than free places. If your desired school does not have availability, we encourage you to consider other options introduced in this guide.

When applying to eighth or ninth grade, you should also have some basic skills in spoken Finnish. The Finnish national core curriculum requires you to complete some studies of Finnish language and literature, and meeting this requirement in basic education in English is simply not possible in such a short time with no prior language skills.

Bear in mind that options for English-medium education in Finland after basic education are still quite limited. We therefore strongly recommend that you actively develop your Finnish skills to ensure that you are able to continue your education smoothly. For children with at least some skills in Finnish, bilingual education might even be a better option in this regard.

How to apply?

You can enrol in English-language education only within the official admission period, and we cannot accept applications outside the admission period. If you miss the application period, we usually recommend you a place in a preparatory education class, or advise you to contact private schools offering English-language education (see page 18). Please note that in the admission to municipal schools in Helsinki, we are obliged to give priority to Helsinki residents.

Basic education in English is available in the following schools:

- ▶ **Ressun peruskoulu** (grades 1-9; IB World School)
hel.fi/peruskoulut/fi/koulut/ressu-comprehensive-school/
- ▶ **Maunulan ala-asteen koulu** (grades 1-6)
hel.fi/peruskoulut/fi/koulut/maunulan-ala-aste/in-english/
- ▶ **Maunulan yhteiskoulu** (grades 7-9)
mayk.fi/en/
- ▶ **Kulosaaren yhteiskoulu** (grades 7-9)
ksyk.fi/language/en/

Read more:

- ▶ Basic education in English:
hel.fi/english-basic-education
- ▶ Admissions:
hel.fi/admissions
- ▶ Private schools offering instruction in English:
page 18





Bilingual education

In bilingual education, 25-50 percent of the teaching is in the target language, and the rest is in Finnish. Bilingual education is a great choice if you want to achieve strong skills in the target language, but also want to make sure that you develop full Finnish-language proficiency, which will give you more choices when planning your studies after basic education. Studying in two languages has many benefits; for example, it develops your problem-solving skills, creative thinking and adaptability.

What is bilingual education like?

In bilingual education, the languages of instruction are Finnish (the school's primary language of instruction) and a second language (Chinese, English, Estonian, North Sami, Russian or Spanish). Each school specifies the amount of the second language instruction in its curriculum. The goals and content of teaching in bilingual education are the same as in regular basic education.

How to apply?

Bilingual education has a limited availability of places, and you need to pass an aptitude test to be accepted. The aptitude test measures your skills in the target language and in Finnish, and your readiness for bilingual education. When applying to first grade, it is enough to know either Finnish or the target language, but for upper grades, you should be appropriately proficient in both languages.

You can enrol in bilingual education only within the official admission period, and we cannot accept applications outside the admission period. Please note that in the admission to municipal schools in Helsinki, we are obliged to give priority to Helsinki residents.

The Finnish-North Sami bilingual education programme is open for all applicants, and does not have an aptitude test.

Bilingual education is offered in the following municipal schools:

Finnish-Chinese

- ▶ Meilahden ala-asteen koulu (grades 1-6)
- ▶ Meilahden yläasteen koulu (grades 7-9)

Finnish-English

- ▶ Kulosaaren ala-asteen koulu (grades 1-6)
- ▶ Töölön ala-asteen koulu (grades 1-6)
- ▶ Malmin peruskoulu (grades 1-4 in 2021-2022)
- ▶ Laajasalon peruskoulu (grades 1-3 in 2021-2022)
- ▶ Vesalan peruskoulu (grades 1-2 in 2021-2022)
- ▶ Kulosaaren Yhteiskoulu (grades 7-9)
- ▶ Helsingin Uusi Yhteiskoulu (grades 7-9)
- ▶ Töölön Yhteiskoulu (grades 7-9)

Finnish-Estonian

- ▶ Latokartanon peruskoulu (grades 1-9)

Finnish-North Sami

- ▶ Pasilan peruskoulu (grades 1-3)

Finnish-Russian

- ▶ Myllypuron peruskoulu (grades 1-9)

Finnish-Spanish

- ▶ Käpylän peruskoulu (grades 1-9)

Read more:

- ▶ Bilingual education: hel.fi/bilingual
- ▶ Admissions: hel.fi/admissions

School websites and school search:

hel.fi/peruskoulut/en/schools-list/

Swedish-language immersion

Swedish-language immersion in basic education is aimed at children who have started Swedish-language immersion in daycare or pre-primary education. A child starts a Swedish-language immersion path from daycare and continues it through primary and lower secondary education. There are seven language immersion paths available in Helsinki.

Primarily, pupils that have attended Swedish-language immersion in daycare or pre-

primary education can be admitted to first grade. Other pupils can be admitted to language immersion classes only if there are places left, and if the pupil has age-appropriate Swedish-language skills.

Read more:

► Swedish-language immersion:
hel.fi/language-immersion



Other alternatives

Private and state-owned schools offering instruction in different languages

In addition to basic education options run by the City of Helsinki, there are several private and state-owned schools in Helsinki that offer instruction in different languages. Some of them follow the Finnish national core curriculum, and some follow international curricula or the curricula of other countries. Some private schools may charge fees. These schools are not governed by City of Helsinki, so if you are interested in learning more about their special emphases, curricula and admission policies, see the schools' websites for more information or contact the schools directly.

Helsinki:

- ▶ **Deutsche Schule Helsinki**
dsh.fi
- ▶ **École française Jules Verne Helsinki**
ecolejulesverne.fi/en
- ▶ **The English School of Helsinki**
engs.fi
- ▶ **European School of Helsinki**
eshelsinki.com
- ▶ **Финско-русская школа**
(The Finnish-Russian School)
svk-edu.fi
- ▶ **International School of Helsinki**
ishelsinki.fi
- ▶ **Kielo International School**
kieloschool.fi
- ▶ **Lycée franco-finlandais d'Helsinki**
hrsk.fi

Options in other cities

You can also check what the neighbouring cities Espoo and Vantaa have to offer. Distances in Helsinki Metropolitan Area are relatively short, and commuting to work and school is usually quite easy and convenient, thanks to the good public transportation system. Espoo and Vantaa have their own international schools, and you can contact these schools directly to ask about their availability. However, as in the case of Helsinki, residents of the respective cities are usually given priority in the admissions.

Espoo:

- ▶ **Espoo International School**
espoo.fi/en-US/Childcare_and_education/Comprehensive_education/Comprehensive_schools/Joint_comprehensive_schools/Espoo_International_School

Vantaa:

- ▶ **International School of Vantaa**
sivistysvantaa.fi/internationalschoolofvantaa/index.html

Home-schooling

In home-schooling, a parent or guardian is responsible for ensuring that you meet the goals set for comprehensive education. Parents or guardians can do the teaching, or they can hire a teacher. Either way, in home-schooling you should study the same subjects and core contents as pupils in classroom instruction. Your municipality monitors your progress during your studies.

If you are interested in home-schooling, contact your local school. They will help you with the paperwork and guide you further with the process.

Get in touch

Inquiries

Anni Holopainen, Education Coordinator
Telephone: +358 9 310 27922
Email: anni.holopainen@hel.fi

Useful links

- ▶ **Education Division:**
hel.fi/educationdivision
- ▶ **Basic education:**
hel.fi/helsinki/en/childhood-and-education/comprehensive/what-how/
- ▶ **Schools in alphabetical order and school search:**
hel.fi/peruskoulut/en/schools-list/
- ▶ **InfoFinland.fi:**
infofinland.fi/en/living-in-finland/education



Helsinki



Education Division

Telephone: +358 9 310 44986 Mon–Fri 10 am–12 noon and 1 pm–3 pm.

Email: kasvatusjakoulutus@hel.fi

Feedback and inquiries: hel.fi/kasvatuksen-ja-koulutuksen-toimiala/en/feedback/feedback



Street address: Töysänkatu 2 D, 00510 Helsinki

Postal address: PL 51300, 00099 Helsingin kaupunki

Telephone: + 358 9 310 8600 Mon–Fri 8.15 am–4 pm

Follow us:



#HelsinkiOppii



@HelsinkiOppii



Helsingin kasvatus ja koulutus



Helsingin kaupunki
City of Helsinki

Publisher: City of Helsinki Education Division

Photos: Jefunne Gimpel, **Illustrations:** Riku Ounaslehto, **Printed by** Grano Oy 12/2020

The information in this guide was revised in December 2020. We reserve the right to make changes.

Up-to-date information: hel.fi/helsinki/en/childhood-and-education/comprehensive/what-how/basic-education-in-different-languages/