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16.1 History and Social Parameters of the Education System

16.1.1 Cornerstones of Historical Developments

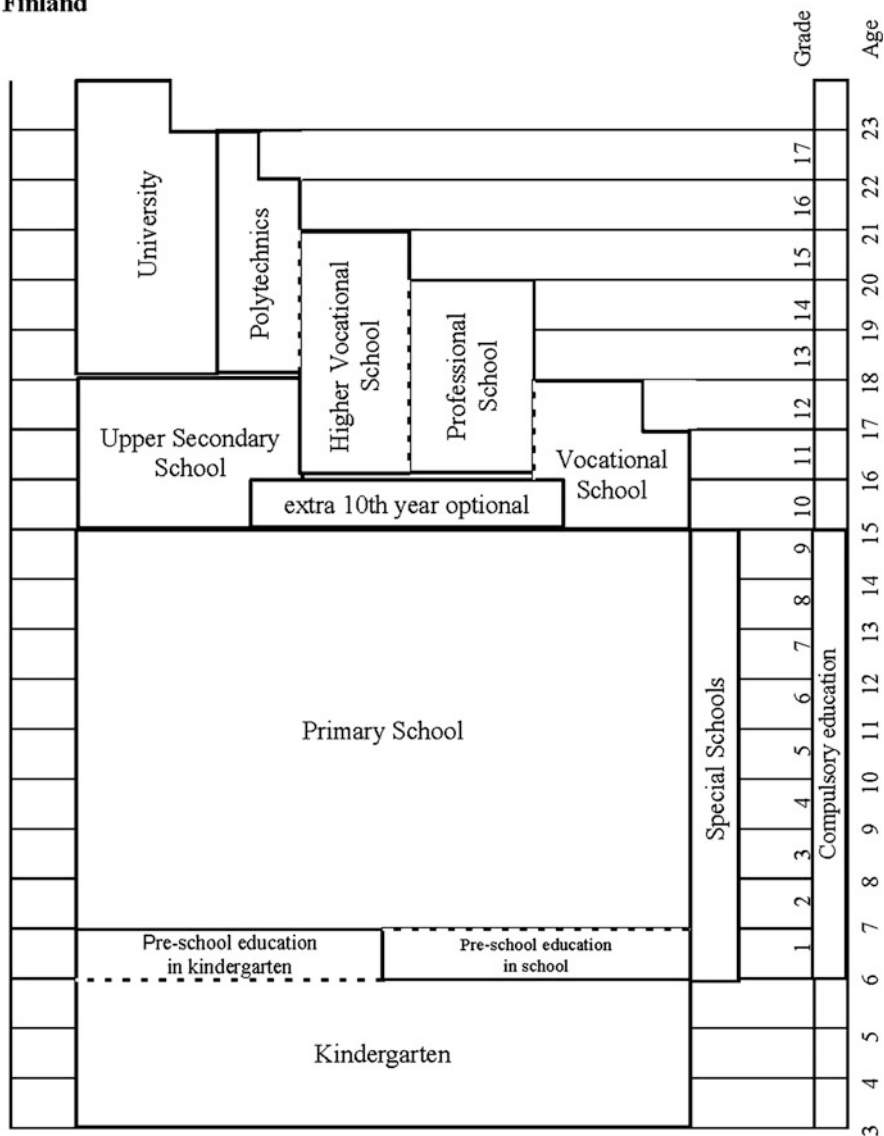
Finland was a part of the kingdom of Sweden until 1809. Education was governed by the Church and was provided in monastic schools and in the cathedral school established in Turku in the thirteenth century. Instruction was in Latin and aimed primarily at training clerics for an ecclesiastical career. The first Finnish university, the *Academia Aboensis*, was established at Turku in 1640. In 1809, Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy under Russia. The legislation and social system from the Swedish era were preserved, however, during the period of autonomy. The Russian educational statutes were not applied to Finland and internal conditions remained very much as before. Finland also established its own parliament and maintained autonomy in economic affairs.

During the nineteenth century, basic education was greatly developed and expanded. The municipal elementary school was established in the 1860s. From 1898 onward, local authorities had to provide formal educational opportunities for all school-aged children, and compulsory schooling was introduced in 1921. Finland became independent in 1917. From the very beginning, the extension of education to all citizens and all parts of the country, along with continuous efforts to increase the level of education, constituted one of the young nation's central policies. In the Constitution, enacted in 1919, the provision of general compulsory education and of basic education free of charge was established as an obligation. Up until the 1970s, compulsory education was provided in the 6-year primary school. After 4 years of primary school, a part of each age group moved up to secondary school, which was divided into the 5-year lower secondary school and the 3-year upper secondary school. In the 1970s, the comprehensive school, a 9-year compulsory school common to the entire age group, was created on the basis of the primary school and lower secondary school. The network of universities expanded gradually after the Second World War to cover the entire country. During the 1990s, a nonuniversity sector of higher education, consisting of almost 30 polytechnics, was created parallel to the university sector.

16.1.2 Key Phases of Reform and Innovation

Since 1921, education has been compulsory until the age of 16. In 1968, the Parliament decided in favor of an integrated comprehensive school system. Within a period of 5 years, between 1972 and 1977, comprehensive schools for Years 1–9 were introduced. This process drew on educational practice from Sweden and the former East Germany especially with regard to the idea that all pupils should be taught together, independent of their social background, learning capabilities, skills, and proficiencies. The year 1980 saw the introduction of a grammar school, a modular type of the upper level of secondary education. The introduction of a new

Finland



core curriculum in 1994 strengthened the municipalities' and schools' responsibility for comprehensive schools. At the same time, a school-based evaluation was introduced and schools opened up for the information society as provided for in the Basic Education Act of 1998.

16.1.3 The Political, Economic, and Cultural Framework

Finland has been an EU member state since 1995 and is the fifth largest country in Europe (338,000 km²). However, Finland has a population of only 5.3 million people, most of whom live in the south-central and southwestern parts of the country. Finland is a sparsely populated country; there are great differences between the regions with respect to their population density. The capital of Finland is Helsinki; together with neighboring towns, it has nearly one million inhabitants. The language of the great majority, about 94 %, is Finnish. Finland also has a Swedish-speaking minority of about 6 %. The third language spoken in Finland is Sami (Lappish), the mother tongue of approximately 1,700 people (0.03 % of the population). The Sami-speaking population lives in the northernmost part of Finland, Lapland, and its members also have the right to social services in their mother tongue. Foreigners make up 1.7 % of the population. Finland has two national churches: about 87 % of the population belongs to the Lutheran Church, and about 1 % to the Greek Orthodox Church. About 10 % have no religious affiliation. In 1998, 6 % of employees worked in agriculture and forestry, 27 % in industry and construction, and 67 % in services. Nearly half of households have a personal computer; practically the entire primary and lower secondary schools, upper secondary general schools, and vocational schools and colleges are connected to the Internet.

16.2 Fundamentals, Organization, and Governance of the Education System

16.2.1 Current Educational Guidelines and Aims

The main objective of the Finnish educational policy is to offer all citizens equal opportunities to receive an education, regardless of age, domicile, financial situation, gender, or mother tongue. Education is considered to be one of the fundamental rights of all citizens. Firstly, provisions concerning the fundamental educational rights guarantee everyone the right to free basic education; the provisions also specify compulsory education. Secondly, the public authorities are obliged to guarantee all citizens equal opportunities for obtaining education on top of their basic education according to their abilities and special needs and for self-development that is not hindered by economic hardship.

A major objective of the Finnish education policy is to achieve as high a level of education as possible for the whole population. One of the basic principles behind this has been to offer post-compulsory education to the whole age groups. A high percentage of an age cohort goes on to the upper secondary education when they leave comprehensive school; more than 90 % of those who complete comprehensive school continue their education in the upper secondary schools or in vocational upper secondary schools.

16.2.2 Legal Basics and Governance of the Education System

The legal basics for the education system in Finland are the Education Act and appropriate subsequent ordinances. The government is responsible for national education goals and the timetables for general education schools. The framework for the curriculum and standards of learning is provided by the National Board of Education. The highest public body with responsibility for schools is the Ministry of Education. The local administration is managed by the municipal authorities. Although schools enjoy autonomy in respect to their educational work, they still have to meet the provisions of core curricula and the regulations passed by local municipalities. Finland does not have a special monitoring agency that controls the work of schools. Coordination and quality assurance are the responsibility of the educational facilities themselves. Legally defined targets and regular statistical reports ensure that the quality of education can be monitored efficiently.

16.2.3 Relationship Between the Public and Private Sectors

There are approximately 4,200 comprehensive schools in Finland, 86 of which are maintained by private education providers and 30 by the state; the remaining schools are owned by municipalities or federations of municipalities. These state schools include, in particular, experimental schools for teacher training at universities. Each autumn, around 60,000 children start school. In 2008, a total of 580,000 pupils attended the country's comprehensive schools. Municipalities provide 95 % and private organizations 5 % of the general upper secondary education. Roughly 118,000 pupils attend the upper secondary school. Among the providers of vocational education and training, 15 % are municipalities, 35 % federations of municipalities, and 40 % private entities. Approximately 250,000 young people attend vocational school. Polytechnics are either municipal or private. All universities are maintained by the state. Together, polytechnics and universities accommodate roughly 305,000 students.

16.3 Overview of the Structure of the Education System

16.3.1 Preschool Education

Since 2001, all of Finland's municipalities have been providing all 6 year olds in the country with a free place at a 1-year preschool. Prior to the age of 6, each Finnish child had the right to attend a children's day care center up to the age of 5. Attendance here is voluntary. Parents who look after their children at home are financially supported. By 2007, 95 % of 6 year olds were taking part in this voluntary year. Preschool education can take place in nursery schools as well as in comprehensive schools. Compulsory education begins at the age of 7 and lasts for 9 years, concluding with the completion of the comprehensive school.

The aim of preschool education is to improve the learning capabilities of children and to create a playful learning environment that offers inspiring activities and that enables children to develop alongside other children. In practice, preschool children are taught new ideas and skills in a playful manner. This was made possible by the education plan drawn up for preschool education and introduced in 2000. This stressed the fostering of individuality, active learning, and teamwork. The curriculum is divided into themes: language and interaction, mathematics, environment and nature, ethics and philosophy, physical and motor skills development, health, and art and culture.

Preschool education is based on the child's own knowledge, skills, and experience. The focus is on play and generating a positive outlook on life, and the methods and activities deployed should be as varied as possible. From an educational point of view, the working methods used to help children get used to working in teams are highly important. Another key consideration lies in promoting personal initiative which is fundamental to all activities.

16.3.2 The Finnish Comprehensive School

Educational thought in Finland is grounded in the Humboldtian notion that every person, regardless of income, should receive a good and complete humanistic education, which he/she needs for his/her further development. No one can know in advance what kind of education is needed. This can only be determined individually based on one's personal development. This is why comprehensive schools have defined their educational aims as an education toward humanity and the achievement of skills to become a responsible citizen. In principle, this means educating pupils to become balanced people with a well-developed sense of self-confidence who are capable of being critical of their environment.

Children start their comprehensive school education in Finland in the year in which they turn 7. School education lasts for 9 years and ends when pupils pass through the comprehensive school or have attended compulsory education for 10 years. All children living in Finland, including those of foreign citizens, are legally obliged to follow a basic education. This compulsory education can be fulfilled by taking part in lessons at comprehensive school, or children can learn the necessary knowledge and skills in any other way. There is no obligation to attend school in Finland and about 300 pupils per year are taught by their parents. In such cases, adults are responsible for providing textbooks and other school materials. Municipal school authorities monitor the situation to ensure that such pupils meet the learning targets set for basic education and nominate a teacher for these pupils who, together with the parents, assesses the learning progress. Pupils taught at home have to demonstrate their knowledge and skills twice a year.

According to law, lessons at the comprehensive school are free of charge. Teachers are free to choose their own textbooks. Pupils have a free warm meal at school each day. The law also envisages that lessons take place close to the pupil's place of residence. If the school journey is over 5 km long, transportation is provided free of charge.

Basic education focuses on learning the practical and theoretical skills and abilities required for life. Children with learning difficulties should be provided with special lessons. Normally, pupils with special educational needs are integrated in regular classes in the comprehensive school. In collaboration with parents, the school psychologist, and a social worker, the class teacher develops an individual course plan for such pupils. This describes the learning skills and strengths of the learner and defines short- and long-term learning goals and the lesson content should this be different from the standard plan. In addition, it also lists the principles of monitoring success and evaluating progress.

The education of children from migrant families is organized in accordance with their skills and abilities. This takes an account of skills migrant children already have. If necessary, support is given in the pupil's mother tongue. School authorities can also provide mother-tongue lessons. In and around Helsinki, lessons are already given in 43 different languages. Pupils may also have religious education in their own religion when requested by three or more families.

The basic education syllabus includes at least the following subjects: mother tongue and literature (Finnish or Swedish), the other national language (Swedish or Finnish), foreign languages, mathematics, physics, chemistry, history, social studies, sport, music, art, handicrafts, home economics, religion, values and standards, biology, geography, and environmental studies. In addition, pupils can choose a variety of electives in line with their own interests. The first foreign language begins in Year 3. Most choose English (96 %) and then Swedish (1 %), German (1 %), French (1 %), and Russian (0.2 %).

The school year in the comprehensive school lasts for 190 days. The school year ends in spring, when May turns to June with a celebration of spring that starts the summer holidays. The new school year usually starts in mid-August. During the school year, there are several holiday periods: the autumn holiday in October, 2 weeks over Christmas and New Year, and a week of winter to sports holiday in February/March. School is also closed on public holidays.

Although the comprehensive school does not finish with a final examination, completing the comprehensive school program entitles pupils to choose between the general upper secondary education and vocational upper secondary education. To be able to do this, marks in their final comprehensive school report should not be poor.

In the lower classes of the comprehensive school (Years 1–6), the class tutor gives most of the lessons. Specialist teachers may be called upon to teach foreign languages, sport, art, music, and handicrafts. In the upper classes, subjects are taught by specialists. Primary school level teachers and specialist teachers are trained in a 5-year master's program (requiring 300 credit points).

16.3.3 Upper Secondary Education

Each year, 56 % of all pupils choose to continue their education at the upper secondary school after Year 9 and 35 % in a vocational school. The upper

secondary school provides general education for pupils who are usually aging from 16 to 19. The upper secondary schools can choose their pupils themselves based on school success in the comprehensive school. Attendance here can last between 2 and 4 years depending on the pupil's pace of learning and progress, which may vary quite starkly. Roughly 19 % of pupils need more than the 3 years normally envisaged to complete upper secondary education. In 2008, there were 413 upper secondary schools in Finland, accommodating 118,000 pupils, 57 % of whom were girls. The majority of upper secondary schools are small, with less than 300 pupils.

The general aims, the division of learning into subjects, and the issues and principles of counseling are determined by the Ministry of Education and the government. The board of education acknowledges the fundamentals of the curriculum and finalizes the learning objectives and the key content of lessons. Municipal authorities use this as a basis to provide information to schools on how the curriculum for a specific school is to be implemented.

Lessons are not organized in a year-based system. Instead, the upper secondary school works on a course-based system comprising obligatory, consolidating, and applied units of learning. There are no classes. Each pupil himself/herself selects individual courses and the pace of learning throughout the upper secondary level. Pupils have to complete obligatory learning units and each pupil is responsible for selecting a sufficient number of courses. Each pupil has to learn at least three foreign languages. The teaching program is divided into 75 courses, 45–49 of which are compulsory. Some upper secondary schools specialize in a particular subject or field such as mathematics, natural sciences, languages, art, sport, and theater. Over 40 % of pupils select long-term courses in mathematics.

Upper secondary school ends with a final, nationwide, standardized examination that takes place at the same time for all schools. The national matriculation examination consists of tests in the mother tongue (Finnish/Swedish/Sami). A pupil can choose a further three or more examinations from subjects such as a second national language (Swedish or Finish), foreign languages (long-term or short-term courses), mathematics, or general studies. In the general studies examination, candidates can choose questions from a variety of subjects or focus on just one specialism (biology, geography, chemistry, physics, history or social studies, religion, values and norms, philosophy, psychology, or health studies). In addition to the mandatory subjects, candidates can also take exams in electives. Foreign language exams have a listening comprehension and a written part.

Exam questions are drawn up each year by the National Matriculation Examination Board which reports to the Ministry of Education. The examination board is made up of university professors who also evaluate the answers of all candidates in line with uniform criteria. Having passed the matriculation exam, pupils are entitled to wear a white cap at their graduation ceremony which takes place in spring or in autumn.

The successful completion of the upper secondary school education provides pupils with the general qualification to apply to a university or to an establishment for higher vocational studies. Therefore, the main purpose of the upper secondary school is to prepare pupils to qualify for all forms of higher education. There are also upper secondary schools for adults in addition to the usual day schools.

Lessons here usually take place in the evenings. Anyone passing the final examination through this channel is also entitled to register at university. The requirements for pupils attending the evening upper secondary school are the same as those attending day school.

16.3.4 Vocational Upper Secondary Education

There are a variety of options open to pupils wishing to obtain a basic vocational education. In principle, young people can follow basic vocational education in special vocational schools as well as in apprenticeship training. The completion of an initial vocational qualification generally takes 3 years depending on the skills and abilities of the pupils. A 3-year vocational qualification gives the right to progress to higher education. The acceptance procedure for basic vocational education is regulated by the state. Vocational schools select their new intake based on previous learning success, but some facilities also carry out their own special entrance examination. Vocational education in Finland is characterized not only by theoretical education provided in several blocks of learning in the school's own workshops but also by work experience in companies. Basic vocational education is offered by municipalities, local authorities, as well as private institutions. Programs are free of charge.

The curriculum comprises specialist contents such as the mother tongue, the second national language, mathematics, physics and chemistry, many kinds of social studies, physical education and health, and arts and culture. The courses primarily aim at the acquisition of vocational skills necessary for work. According to law, the purpose of vocational education is to teach the skills required for professional life and to provide pupils with the abilities to exercise a professional activity independently. All told, there are 75 professional avenues. The final examination also includes a final major piece of work.

An apprenticeship is a fixed-term agreement between the training facility, the apprentice, and the employer. The theoretical part of the program is coordinated with the practical work provided by the employer. The length of such a program varies from 6 months to 4 years. The program is rounded off with a "demonstration" exam in which the apprentice demonstrates the theoretical and practical aspects of his/her profession, regardless of the nature of the professional skills acquired. During the apprenticeship, the apprentice is paid a salary that is usually equivalent to the minimum wage for the field. The employer receives compensation from the government for the costs of training the apprentice.

16.3.5 Higher Education

The Finnish higher education system consists of universities and polytechnics (AMK institutions). Universities carry out research, teaching, and social activities; however, the core of university-based activities lies in combining research and

teaching. Students can obtain bachelor's and master's degrees as well as academic, postgraduate doctorates. The completion of a bachelor's degree (comprising 180 credits) takes 3 years and a master's degree (300 credits) a further 2 years. Doctorate programs require students to write a dissertation and document their in-depth studies, which need to total 240 credits. Polytechnics are mostly multidisciplinary, regional, vocational higher education facilities whose activities are characterized by their close proximity to the working life. Final examinations are also professional higher education qualifications that normally require 140–160 credits. Like universities, bachelor's degrees require 180 credits.

16.3.6 Polytechnics

The Finnish polytechnic system was set up during the 1990s. Courses are characterized, as described above, by their proximity to the working life and aim to prepare students to activities in professional fields within the various disciplines. Students must have completed either the matriculation examination or an upper secondary level vocational qualification. Polytechnics select their students themselves; applications take place through the national joint application procedure.

Courses usually last for 3.5–4 years and provide professional education in the following sectors: natural resources, technology and traffic, communications, business and administration, tourism, catering and institutional management, health care and social services, culture, education, and leisure and sport. The study program consists of basic and professional courses, optional studies, theoretical and practical courses to boost occupational skills, and the completion of a thesis.

Polytechnics are not administered by the state, but by municipalities and private organizations. However, state funding does meet 60 % of the financial requirements of the polytechnics. Universities and polytechnics can usually accommodate up to 60–70 % of an age cohort in the country. The aim of the government is to provide higher education to an ever-growing proportion of the population.

16.3.7 University Education

University education is the oldest form of education in Finland. The first university, the Royal Academy of Turku, was founded in 1640 in Turku, the former capital of Finland. Following the great fire in Turku and the loss of the city's status as capital in 1812, the university moved to Helsinki to become the "imperial" university.

University activities are based on the principles of academic freedom and the autonomy of universities. The latter means that the universities enjoy a wide-ranging decision-making authority to govern their own affairs. Faculties can determine their own examination regulations, curriculum, and entrance procedures for new students. Furthermore, universities can decide on the number of students to accept in the various disciplines. There are sufficient places at the universities to accommodate 21,000 new students (roughly 33 % of an age cohort). Competition

for student places in higher education is intense: each year between 6,500 and 8,000 young people apply for 1 of the 800 places to study to become a primary school teacher, for example.

Legally, universities are responsible for fostering free research and academic and artistic education. They should also provide teaching of the highest standard on the basis of findings of academic research. University activities in research, training, and teaching should also meet high international standards and take account of ethical principles and good academic practice. All 20 universities in Finland are state run and largely state funded. In 2007, 150,000 students were following bachelor's or master's programs at Finnish universities. This includes 4,200 foreign students. Women receive over half of the degrees awarded at all levels except the doctorate. Women represent over 80 % of the students in health science, veterinary medicine, pharmacy, and education.

The network of universities covers all regions of the country from Helsinki to Rovaniemi including southern Lapland. Finland's university includes ten multidisciplinary universities, three universities of technology, three schools of economics and business administration, and four art academies. In principle, university study is open to all and students do not have to pay for tuition.

16.4 Developments in the Current School System

16.4.1 Language Programs

Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish; both are obligatory subjects in the comprehensive school. For the majority, Swedish is in practice a foreign language, while most of the Swedish-speaking population are bilingual. On top of this, pupils should be able to speak a world language. English is the first foreign language that 95 % of parents choose for their children, followed by 3 % for German and 1 % for French. In 2008, some schools began to offer Russian. In total, less than 300 pupils started to learn Russian.

About 20 % of the lower secondary level pupils learn German and about 10 % French, mainly as an elective. The language program is thus substantial in size and occupies a large part of the curriculum. In practice, this means that there is less room left for the other subjects. The struggle for course content arises over and over again whenever a new curriculum is developed. Discussions are currently rife, concerning the role of Swedish and religious education. Criticism has also highlighted the position of such subjects as music, art, sport, and handicrafts in the curriculum with many people sharing the opinion that too little time is allocated to these subjects.

16.4.2 School-Based Curriculum

Since the 1990s, a great deal of work has taken place in curriculum planning. In the past, much was prescribed by the national school administration.

The curriculum for general education schools was determined centrally. Now, the National Board of Education prescribes only a loose curriculum framework, and the schools write their own curricula. This reform emphasizes the role of the teachers; in practice, teachers have become curriculum-makers. As a result, they have been engaged in extensive discussions on the purpose of schooling and the aims and goals of the curriculum. Parents have also been invited to these discussions, and in some cases, pupils have also had the opportunity to participate in the creation of the curriculum. A nationwide evaluation process has been introduced to ensure the implementation of the curriculum. The annual obligatory national evaluation process:

- Does not include a nationwide inspection of the whole population of school year or comparative tests for all
- Assesses 100–200 pupils from each school who are chosen as a representative selection, with roughly 5,000–8,000 pupils of an age cohort being evaluated
- Makes its selection based on economic, regional, social, and gender criteria and is obligatory
- Alternates between mathematics and mother-tongue language and literature each year, while other subjects are also added
- Requires about 18 months between the preparation of the evaluation and the presentation of the results (schools receive initial results much earlier)
- Does not compile ranking lists nor does it publish the results of the individual schools
- Publishes national averages with each pupil receiving his/her own results
- Provides schools and teachers with precise instructions on how the tests assess knowledge and skills in a particular subject
- Encourages both the school and its maintaining body to use the results and their analyses as the basis for further school developments

16.4.3 Personal Curriculum and Guidance

More than before, teachers are being called upon to develop a personal curriculum for each pupil and are better equipped to implement it. Such a plan contains a description of the learning skills and strengths of the pupil, the short- and long-term aims of learning, a list of course content if this is different for the learner than in the standard curriculum, basic information on subsequent controls, and the evaluation of the pupil's learning progress. If supportive measures are required, such measures and how they are monitored are also described. Such a plan offers great support to teachers in the planning of their lessons and forms the basis for individualization and differentiation in the educational process. A personalized curriculum also permits achievement to be personalized.

In the first 4 years of school, children only receive an oral report; later marks can, and from Year 7 must, be given. Oral reports only allow personal development plans to be compared, as is it not possible to compare pupils on the basis of

achievement. Even the allocation of marks has to take account of the individual situation of pupils to avoid sending out discouraging signals.

Each comprehensive school has a committee for pupil care and guidance which meets at least once a week. The committee consults on the best ways to help pupils with cognitive, social, or emotional problems and tries to find out the causes of learning difficulties in order to develop a plan to best optimize support and cooperation with parents. If weaknesses cannot be remedied despite all the effort, an individual curriculum with lower requirements is drawn up.

16.4.4 Profile Education and Competition Between Schools

Parents and pupils can choose “their” comprehensive school. One key factor in the selection process is the curriculum of the school. Pupils can emphasize certain language programs or musical subjects in the curriculum, and this generates a degree of competition between schools. Competition and profiling operate in society and in some municipalities. As a result, some small schools may have to close and pupils have to travel further to school.

It is also necessary to develop a curriculum for all schools which takes better account of interdisciplinary issues in all classes.

16.4.5 Multicultural Education and Upbringing

Finland has been an extremely homogeneous country. There are only few immigrant pupils at Finnish schools, amounting to between 2 % and 3 % of the school population. Most of these children come from Somalia, Estonia, Russia, or the former Yugoslavia. Immigrant pupils have the right to have 2 h lessons per week in their mother tongue. In addition, they receive extra lessons in Finnish. Children of migrant families can be taught for 1 year in preparatory classes of no more than ten pupils. In the future, the number of immigrant children in Finland is expected to grow. The Ministry of Education has drawn up a precise forecast of needs for teachers who are capable of teaching such immigrant children.

16.5 New Developments

On 28 June 2012, the government issued a decree on the national aims for school education and for the basis distribution of school lessons. The decree defines the aims for preschool education, education in comprehensive schools, upper secondary education, and preparatory school education. It also contains details of the distribution of lesson in school and a series of more precise provisions including language lessons and lessons for those pupils who need particular support.

The National Board of Education is preparing the core curriculum for preschool education, for comprehensive school education, and at the upper level of secondary

education and is expected to present its results at the end of 2014. Municipal school authorities will write local curricula in conjunction with schools based on this new core curriculum. The new curriculum is to be applied to each comprehensive school from the beginning of the 2016/2017 school year.

The country has been experiencing a demographic shift with the rural population increasingly moving to urban centers. Instead of having separate schools, municipal school authorities have established new integrated comprehensive schools (for Years 1–9) in the belief that such a type of school is educationally more effective. This has led to the closure of many lower-level (village) schools for Years 1–6. Such schools had 2–3 teachers for 15–20 pupils. In 1990, Finland had 2,134 such small schools accommodating 50 pupils or less; in 2010, there were just 646 schools. In 2013, a total of 2,644 lower- and upper-level schools accommodated 520,000 pupils.

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