



# EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK **FINLAND**



## EDUCATION POLICY PROFILE

This **policy profile on education** in Finland is part of the new *Education Policy Outlook* series, which will present comparative analysis of education policies and reforms across OECD countries. Building on the substantial comparative and sectorial policy knowledge base available within the OECD, the series will result in a biennial publication (first volume in 2014). It will develop a comparative outlook on education policy by providing: a) analysis of individual countries' educational context, challenges and policies (education policy profiles) and of international trends and b) comparative insight on policies and reforms on selected topics.

Designed for **policy makers, analysts and practitioners** who seek information and analysis of education policy taking into account the importance of national context, the country policy profiles will offer constructive analysis of education policy in a comparative format. Each profile will review the current context and situation of the country's education system and examine its challenges and policy responses, according to six policy levers that support improvement:

- Students: How to raise outcomes for all in terms of 1) equity and quality and 2) preparing students for the future
- Institutions: How to raise quality through 3) school improvement and 4) evaluation and assessment
- System: How the system is organised to deliver education policy in terms of 5) governance and 6) funding.

Some country policy profiles will contain spotlight boxes on selected policy issues. They are meant to draw attention to specific policies that are promising or showing positive results and may be relevant for other countries.

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**Sources:** This country profile draws on OECD indicators from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and the annual publication *Education at a Glance*, and refers to country and thematic studies such as OECD work on early childhood education and care, evaluation and assessment for improving school outcomes, equity and quality in education, governing complex education systems, vocational education and training, and tertiary education.

Most of the figures quoted in the different sections refer to Annex B, which presents a table of the main indicators for the different sources used throughout the country profile. Hyperlinks to the reference publications are included throughout the text for ease of reading and also in the References and further reading section, which lists both OECD and non-OECD sources.

More information is available from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills ([www.oecd.org/edu](http://www.oecd.org/edu)) and its web pages on Education Policy Outlook ([www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm)).



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## HIGHLIGHTS

### Finland's educational context

**Students:** Finland has been and continues to be one of OECD's top PISA performers since 2000, with students performing in the top ranks in reading, science and mathematics between 2000 and 2009, and low impact of students' background on educational performance. Adults in Finland have also ranked among the top skilled across participating countries in the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), with younger adults scoring higher than all adults in Finland and young adults in other countries. Finland has nine years of basic education (comprehensive school) with a strong focus on equity and on preventing low achievement, and offers flexibility at upper secondary level between general and vocational education and training options that lead to tertiary education. Completion rates in upper secondary and tertiary are higher than the OECD average. In the context of the economic crisis, unemployment rates for 25-64 year-olds increased but remained below the OECD average.

**Institutions:** Finnish society and its education system place great importance on their schools and day-care facilities and trust the proficiency of their school leaders, teachers and educational staff, with no national standardised tests or high-stakes evaluation. Teaching is a highly appreciated profession, and teachers are required to have a master's degree that includes research and practice-based studies. Compared to workers with a tertiary education, their salary is slightly above the OECD average. They have pedagogical autonomy to teach and assess students' learning, which requires capacity and professional development for both teaching and evaluation responsibilities.

**Governance and funding:** In a decentralised approach, the Finnish Government defines and sets educational priorities, while schools and day-care centres are principally maintained and supported by municipalities (local authorities), which have significant responsibility for organisation of education, funding, curriculum and hiring personnel. A national Education and Research Development Plan outlines education policy priorities every four years, and the government and the Ministry of Education and Culture prepare and implement education policy. Social and political agreement on the value of education has provided stability on the structure and key features of the education system.

### Key issues

Finland's high education performance is supported by system-level policies that encourage quality and equity. These can be continued and complemented with further focus on reducing recent inequities in specific groups: large performance gaps are seen between boys and girls and between native students and students with immigrant background. In addition, demographic changes imply a smaller proportion of younger people in Finland, and there have been some mismatches between supply and demand of study places and labour market needs.

### Recent policy responses

Finland's preventive approach to school failure has been successful. It combines early recognition by teachers of low performance with holistic support that involves both school and social welfare staff. Teacher quality has also been developed through strong initial teacher education to a master's level with practical experience.

Further reforms have been introduced. The transfer of early childhood education and care services from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013) represents a major shift in perspective. [Education and Research 2011-2016: A development plan](#) aims to increase participation of students with immigrant background in preparatory education to improve their opportunity to finish upper secondary education, [Curriculum reform](#) is being developed from pre-primary through upper secondary education, to be implemented from 2016. Efforts are being made to ensure post-basic qualification completion and employment for youth, including the introduction of the [Youth Guarantee](#) programme (2013).

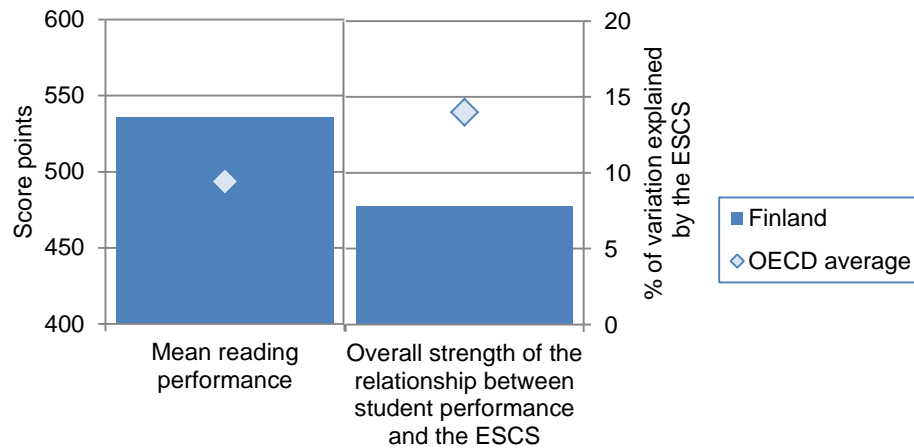
To provide clear criteria, raise quality and facilitate evaluation, [Quality Criteria for Basic Education](#) (2010) was developed, and evaluation activities will be merged into a new Education Evaluation Centre from 2014.

A general reform of the Finnish municipality structure has been prepared to secure high quality and equitable education services and consolidate local self-government.



Finland achieved higher-than-average reading scores in PISA 2009 (536 mean score compared to the OECD average of 493), and the impact of socio-economic status on attainment (8%) was lower than the OECD average of 14% (Figure 1).

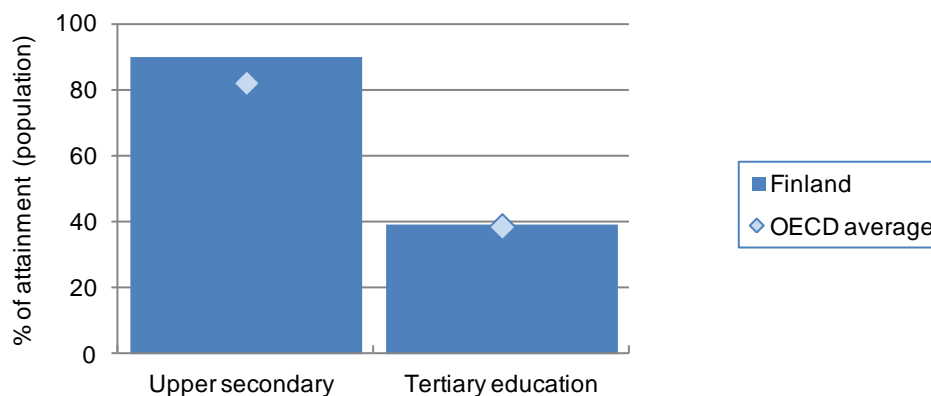
**Figure 1. Student performance in reading and relationship between student performance and the economic, social and cultural status (ESCS), for 15-year-olds, PISA 2009**



Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091450-en>.

Secondary and tertiary education attainment is at the OECD average or higher: 90% of 25-34 year-olds have attained at least secondary education (compared to the OECD average of 82%), and 39% have attained tertiary education (compared to the OECD average of 39%) (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Upper secondary and tertiary attainment for 25-34 year-olds, 2011**



Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932848039>.



## EQUITY AND QUALITY: ENSURING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

Finland is among the **top performing** and **most equitable** countries according to PISA performance of 15-year-olds, but students' background and gender matter. Finland has both a large percentage of top performers and a smaller-than-average proportion of low performers (students below proficiency Level 2 on the PISA reading scale), and the impact of socio-economic status on the risk of low performance is lower than the OECD average (Figure 3). Since 2000, however, the impact of socio-economic background has increased.

Equal opportunity in education underpins the concept of the welfare system in Finland. Fair and inclusive policies in **early childhood education and care (ECEC)** contribute to an equitable education system. Day care and pre-primary education are available, and more than half of all 4-year-olds attend. From 2001, pre-primary education was made available for 6-year-olds to prepare them for first grade of basic education; it is free and voluntary, and almost all 6-year-olds attend (98%). However, the government target is to ensure that all children participate in pre-primary education, including children living in remote areas and children with immigrant background.

System-level policies assure equity for students. **Basic education** (comprehensive school) includes nine years of compulsory schooling with a voluntary tenth year. Education is free, and textbooks and a daily meal are provided. There is no tracking or streaming of students in comprehensive schools. The proportion of 15-year-olds who have repeated at least a grade in 2009 (2.8%) is among the lowest in OECD countries (OECD average 13%). Early intervention and individual guidance and support by all educational personnel are seen as key to ensuring that no one is left behind (see Spotlight 1). Most of the variance in performance of 15-year-olds is seen within schools rather than between schools, showing that schools in Finland have similar achievement levels and students are not selected by academic ability.

**Boys and students with immigrant background** have a higher risk of lower performance. According to PISA 2009, while the reading performance of boys was well above the OECD average, they scored 55 points less than girls in reading (compared to the OECD average of 39 points). There is also a considerable gap in reading performance between native students and students with an immigrant background. The relative risk of students with immigrant background scoring below Level 2 was the greatest of all OECD countries in *PISA 2009*, with native students scoring 60 points more than students with an immigrant background, after accounting for socio-economic background (compared to the OECD average of 27 points). Improving performance of these students can contribute to raising overall equity and quality of education, especially since the immigrant population in Finland has increased significantly in the last ten years. However, according to PISA 2009, the proportion of 15-year-olds with immigrant background is small (2.6%) compared to the OECD average (10.3%).

**The challenge: Sustaining a preventive approach to school failure and improving educational opportunity and success of boys and students with immigrant background.**

### Recent policies and practices

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been the object of different reforms. Administration and steering of ECEC services were transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013). A *Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education* (2000) was established from 2001 and renewed in 2010 with *National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC* (2003, renewed in 2005) for the design of local curricula. In addition, legislation on early childhood education and development of uniform pre-primary education instruction are in progress to ensure that all children have equal prerequisites.

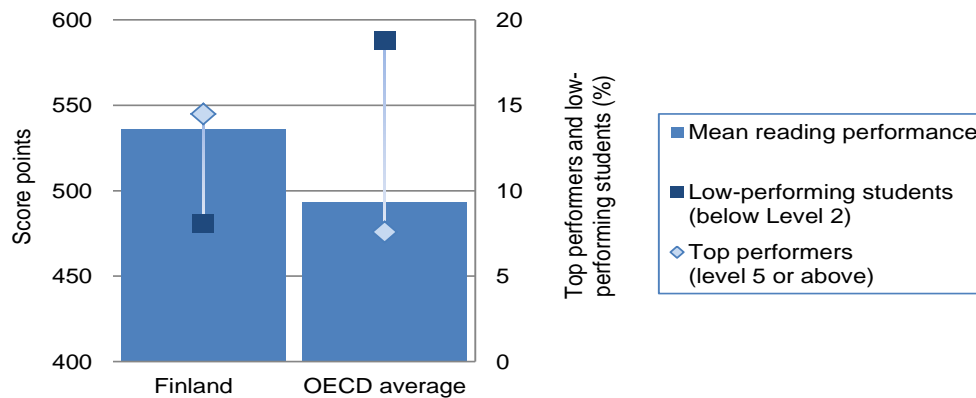
*Curriculum reform* for pre-primary to upper secondary education is in preparation for 2016. Working groups of education officials, researchers and teachers are focusing on structure and national objectives (set in June 2012), conceptions of learning, support for learning and the different subjects. The renewal aims to build on strengths, supporting student growth and focusing on the core educational content and local pedagogical development. It will be completed by 2014 and local curricula should be prepared by 2016.

Finland has been a pioneer in measures to prevent low performance (see Spotlight 1). The *Ministry of Education Strategy 2015* (2003) outlines key strategic areas in education, including securing equal opportunity in education and culture, and promoting participation and inclusion. To support disadvantaged groups:

- The *National Core Curriculum for Instruction Preparing Immigrants for Basic Education* (2009) aims to support students with immigrant background so that they can attend basic education.
- The Action Programme for Equal Opportunity in Education (2013) aims to improve the situation of disadvantaged groups and to reduce gender differences and the impact of socio-economic background in education. This will include one year of preparatory education for immigrants (starting in 2014) to improve opportunities for general upper secondary education for students with immigrant background.



**Figure 3. Mean score in reading performance and percentage of low and top performers, for 15-year-olds, PISA 2009**



Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091450-en>.

### Spotlight 1. Preventing failure by providing early support

Part of Finland's success in education outcomes (as measured by PISA) results from a combination of measures that help prevent failure and support students from a holistic perspective. These measures include the following:

Every child has been entitled to a place in day care since 1996, and pre-primary education for 6-year-olds has been available since 2001.

Comprehensive schools provide nine years of compulsory education to all students. There is no tracking or streaming of students, and a voluntary tenth year is available for students who were unable to enter upper secondary level education upon completion of ninth grade. Approximately 2% of students leaving comprehensive schools take part in the tenth year which provides an opportunity for students to improve their scores, prepare for and continue with upper secondary level education or decide on an occupational area.

All students in compulsory education can receive guidance and support within their schools. In basic education, this includes general, intensified and special support. Importance is placed on early intervention by providing necessary individual support as early as possible and working to resolve problems before they become more serious. To support this, social and health services work closely with educators at the school level:

- Schools and teachers are responsible for identifying those who may be falling behind. These students receive additional support, such as remedial instruction. If required, teacher's assistants and special needs teachers are available to provide further support.
- All municipalities and larger schools have student welfare teams which include teachers, the school nurse, the school psychologist, the student counsellor, and the principal. Student welfare teams have regular meetings to share information, discuss issues related to students and deal with these issues as soon as possible.

Finland continues to develop new methods that help identify early those children who need support. For example, the Ministry is funding a web-based service ([www.LukiMat.fi](http://www.LukiMat.fi)) for learning difficulties in reading and mathematics. Aimed at educators, school personnel and parents, it provides information on reading and mathematical learning for children from aged five to eight years old and on difficulties in mastering those skills. The service focuses on children's development of skills and includes games such as *EKAPELLI*, which can be used by individuals and schools for early identification of children who have difficulty in reading and to help children improve their reading and writing skills.



## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE: WELL-DEVELOPED GENERAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The capacity of education systems to effectively develop **skills and labour market perspectives** can play an important role in educational decisions of young people. In Finland, the average skills level for adults (16-64 year-olds) is one of the highest of all countries participating in PIAAC, and young adults (16-24 year-olds) have higher skills proficiency levels than the average for adults in Finland and young people in other participant countries. Overall, an above-average proportion of workers is well matched to their skills level (one of the lowest skills mismatches across PIAAC countries). In Finland, unemployment rates across all educational levels were slightly below the OECD average in 2011, although unemployment rates for 25-64 year-olds increased in the context of the economic crisis (2008-11). More youth combine school with work than the OECD average, and the share of 15-29 year-olds not in education and not employed (11.8%) is below the OECD average of 15.8% (Figure 4). As highlighted in [Finland's education development plan](#), an expected drop in the proportion of young people (compared to other countries) may lead to a shortage of workers in the labour market.

Finland has high **upper secondary education** attainment rates (90% of 25-34 year-olds, compared to the OECD average of 82%) (Figure 2), and both general and vocational education and training (VET) options are available. In 2011, 70% of upper secondary students are enrolled in vocational programmes (above the OECD average of 44%). This includes a significant proportion of adults not in initial education, as the enrolment rate of 15-19 year-olds in vocational programmes is 30% (close to the OECD average of 26%). At the end of the three-year general education curriculum, students can take the national matriculation examination which provides access to tertiary education. A modular structure allows students to combine general education and VET studies. This contributes to preventing dropout and ensures flexibility within the system.

**Vocational Education and Training** can help ease entry into the labour market. Students can pursue VET in upper secondary and in polytechnics at the tertiary level of education. Initial vocational training programmes take three years to complete, including at least half a year of on-the-job learning in workplaces. VET providers organise the training, which can be in vocational institutions or apprenticeships. Upon completion, the qualification provides formal eligibility for tertiary education. Graduation rates in pre-vocational/vocational programmes are high (99% compared to the OECD average of 47% in 2011), but only 54% of students in these programmes graduated before the age of 25, compared to an average of 80% in OECD countries.

Over one-third (39%) of the population aged 25-34 years has attained **tertiary education** (Figure 2). Those with tertiary qualifications have high rates of employment. They can also expect to earn at least 49% more than those with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (below the 2009 OECD average of 54%). In Finland, resource allocation and intake of students by field of study for tertiary education is based on forecasts of labour market demands. However, Finland has experienced students queuing for university entry as a result of a mismatch between the supply of student places and students' demand for certain fields of study. As in other OECD countries, the expansion of tertiary education implies providing a sufficiently broad offer of studies to address the needs of the labour market as well as the interests of the student population.

**The challenge: Ensuring that well-developed general and vocational education and training programmes are aligned to labour market needs and support effective transitions.**

### Recent policies and practices

A National Development Programme for Information Guidance and Counselling Services (2007-13), co-financed by the EU European Social Fund, aimed to develop guidance services online, strengthen staff development, and carry out evaluation and research. It also included projects to reduce dropout rates at upper secondary level, focusing on personal counselling and multi-professional student support teams.

The [Preparatory Instruction and Guidance for VET \(Ammattistartti\)](#) programme (initiated in 2006 and permanently adopted in 2010) was developed to reduce early school-leaving and prevent school dropout by providing instruction to help students become familiar with educational and vocational opportunities and find a place in upper secondary education and training.

The [Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009-2015](#) outlines the goals for internationalisation of higher education, including increasing the quality and attractiveness of institutions.

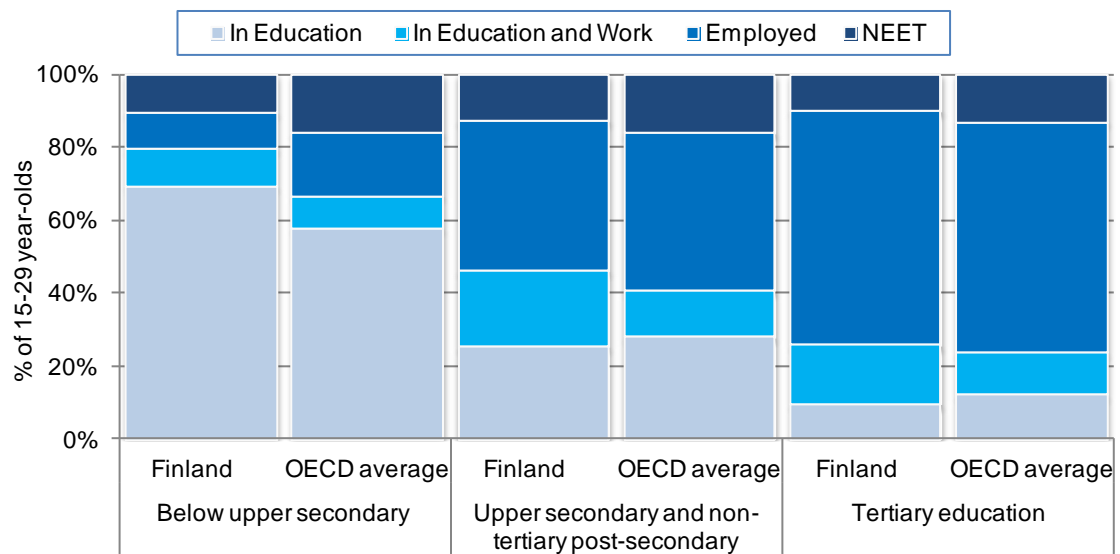
A reform of tertiary education student admissions and study structures (by the end of 2015) aims to improve students' transition from secondary to higher education and include a joint admission system for both universities and polytechnics.

The [Youth Guarantee](#) (2013) aims to help young people complete post-basic qualifications and find employment. The guarantee provides everyone under 25 years old and recent graduates under 30 years old either a job, a traineeship, a study place, a workshop or a labour market placement within three months of becoming unemployed.





Figure 4. Percentage of 15-29 year-olds in education and not in education, by educational attainment and work status, 2011



NEET: Neither Employed, nor in Education and Training

Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>.



## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: TRUST AND PROFICIENCY OF SCHOOL LEADERS AND TEACHERS

The key to maintaining achievement in Finland's 2 644 comprehensive schools ([Statistics Finland, 2012](#)) is ensuring the conditions for school leaders and teachers to succeed. Overall, Finland's **learning environments**, including student-teacher relations, classroom climates and principals' involvement in school matters are slightly less positive than the OECD average (Figure 5). According to PISA 2009, 49% of 15-year-olds in Finland reported that their teachers are interested in their well-being (below the OECD average of 66%), indicating students' less positive view of relations with their teachers.

**School leaders** have wide-ranging responsibilities and tasks, within a framework of considerable autonomy. School leaders, appointed by local educational authorities, are required to have a teacher qualification (up to a master's degree), a certificate in educational administration and teaching experience. There is no national regulation regarding participation in training for school leaders, which is the responsibility of municipalities. University-level degree programmes in educational administration are available as pre-service leadership development, and the National Board of Education awards certificates in educational administration which give eligibility for school leaders posts. National legislation describes principals' tasks broadly, including administrative matters, financial management, pedagogical matters (student assessment, formative evaluation of staff), personnel administration and teaching. A large proportion of principals is expected to retire in the coming years, which may lead to the loss of valuable leadership experience. More pedagogical and financial management training could be important, as principals have such a wide range of responsibilities. Ensuring school leadership preparation and training can contribute to further strengthening capacity across schools in Finland.

**Teachers** in Finland receive a strong theoretical and practical teacher education and are highly respected (see Spotlight 2). Pre-service teacher-training requirements in higher education institutions include a competitive examination to enter training and a teaching practicum as part of pre-service training. All teachers in basic and general upper secondary education have a master's degree. In 2011, annual teaching hours of teachers in public institutions in Finland were below the OECD average at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels. As trusted professionals, teachers have considerable pedagogical autonomy to interpret the curricula and to choose teaching methods and materials, as well as resources and methods to continuously assess students' progress. The ratio of teachers' salaries to the earnings of tertiary-educated workers is above the OECD average at primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels. Continuing professional development (CPD), obligatory for most teachers in Finland, varies from one sector to another and is partly defined in collective trade union agreements. Employers (usually municipalities) decide on programmes and forms of CPD. Local educational authorities are required to fund three days of mandatory professional development per year for all teachers.

**The challenge: Continuing to strengthen the capacity of school leaders and teachers to deliver quality education in all schools.**

### Recent policies and practices

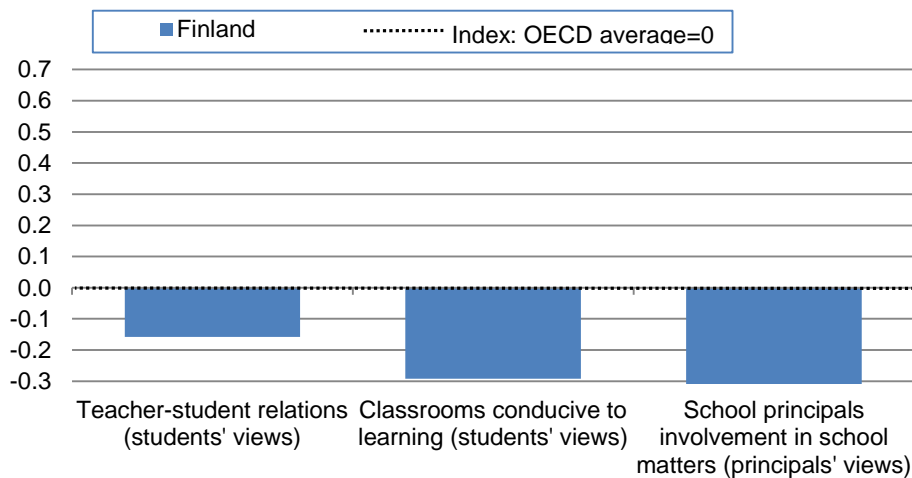
Initial teacher education is of high quality and includes strong theoretical and practical training (see Spotlight 2).

The Ministry of Education appointed an [Advisory Board for Professional Development of Education Personnel](#) (2008) to examine and improve professional development and the changing needs of teachers.

The [Finnish Network for Teacher Induction, Osaava Programme](#) (2010-16), a national fixed-term programme for continuing professional development, was launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture to ensure systematic CPD of staff in schools. The programme supports education providers to systematically and continually develop the skills and knowledge of their staff according to locally identified needs. The total number of education staff participating in Osaava or other CPD increased from 30 000 in 2009 to 70 000 in 2012.



Figure 5. The learning environment, PISA 2009



Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091559-en>.

### Spotlight 2. Excellence in teachers

One of the factors adduced to explain Finnish success in education is the quality of its teachers. A reform at the end of the 1970s strengthened teacher education and made it highly selective. Teacher education moved from teachers' colleges into universities, and primary school teachers were required to have a master's degree. At present, teacher education is provided by nine universities, of which eight have teacher training schools. According to selected evidence, only about 10% of candidates who apply to primary teacher studies are accepted. Applicants for teacher education must have passed the Finnish matriculation examination (or a foreign equivalent) or completed a three-year vocational education programme.

The student selection process for primary teacher education involves two stages. The first step is an examination to assess applicants' academic learning skills. The second phase is a combination of written questions and aptitude tests assessing applicants' suitability for the profession as well as their skills, motivation and commitment to studying.

Primary school teachers major in education. They may specialise in teaching one or several subjects in their minor subject studies. Completion of an extensive course in a minor subject (at least 60 credits under the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) also makes them eligible to act as a subject teacher in basic education grades 1-9. Upper grade teachers major in specific subjects and do their pedagogical studies over a five-year programme or as a separate module after graduation.

With strong theoretical and practical content, teacher education is research-based, with emphasis on developing pedagogical knowledge. Teachers are trained to adapt their teaching to different learning needs and styles of students. There is also emphasis on the clinical component, and teachers are required to have teaching practice at teacher training schools run by the university or at affiliated schools.

Also, other teacher groups, such as kindergarten teachers and vocational teachers, are required to have a tertiary education degree.



## EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES: FOCUS ON SELF-EVALUATION

Defining **evaluation and assessment** strategies is important for improving student outcomes and developing a better and more equitable school system. In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture conducts evaluation through three organisations: the National Board of Education, the Finnish Education Evaluation Council and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council. According to the government programme, these evaluation institutions will be merged into a single new Education Evaluation Centre starting in 2014.

**System evaluations** use national assessments of learning outcomes, international student assessments, self-evaluation and external evaluation of education providers. The objectives defined in legislation and the national core curricula provide guidance for education providers (municipalities), which are responsible for designing and implementing local curricula and evaluating education. The National Board of Education is responsible for national assessments of learning outcomes, with the main purpose to analyse to what extent national core curricula objectives have been reached. Evaluations are sample-based and conducted according to the Ministry's evaluation plan, covering academic subjects and also arts, crafts and cross-curricular themes. Results are sent to education providers for development purposes and are not used to rank schools.

**Schools** conduct self-evaluations. In 1991, school inspections were abolished, and there is no national system for evaluating performance of schools. Schools conduct self-evaluations as part of their responsibilities and can also participate in external evaluations conducted by the Finnish Education Evaluation Council.

The education system places importance on **trust and proficiency** of teachers. There is no national evaluation system for teachers, and guidelines for teacher appraisals are set out in the contract between the local government employer (local authorities) and the teachers' trade union. Principals are pedagogical leaders of their schools. Most schools have an annual performance review system where the principal works with teachers on their evaluation to determine how to develop teaching and agree on areas for in-service training.

**Student assessment** in basic education is the responsibility of teachers. Teachers have pedagogical autonomy to assess ongoing student progress, and students are also encouraged to learn to design and assess their learning as they reach higher levels of education. The first national assessment is the Matriculation Examination at the end of general upper secondary education. According to PISA 2009, 94.4% of students are in schools whose principals reported that they use assessment data to make decisions about retention or promotion of students (Figure 6).

**The challenge: Continue to ensure that all players in the education system have the capacity to use evaluation and assessment to improve student outcomes.**

### Recent policies and practices

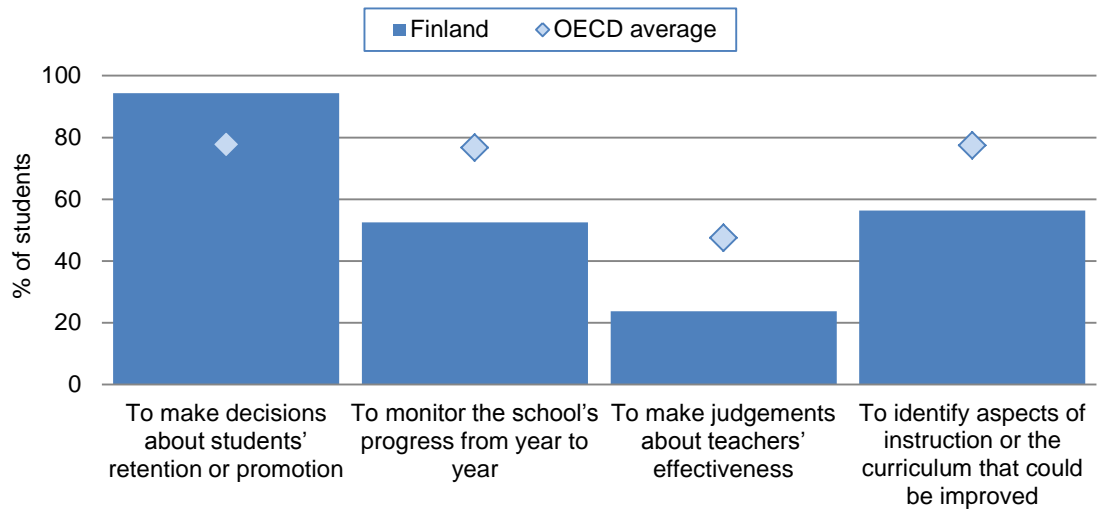
The Ministry of Education and Culture is preparing an [Education Evaluation Plan](#) for third-party evaluations and evaluations carried out to monitor learning outcomes from pre-primary education to universities. According to the government programme, as of 2014, evaluation of education (under the responsibility of Evaluation Councils and the National Board of Education) will be concentrated into a newly established Education Evaluation Centre to enhance evaluations of Finnish education.

The Ministry of Education and Culture developed [Quality Criteria for Basic Education](#) (2010) to provide a tool for school evaluation and ensure quality enhancement.

A proposal for a [National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning](#) to improve the effectiveness and transparency of the qualifications system and to better link to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was submitted to Parliament in May 2012, and in 2013 is under scrutiny by Parliament.



Figure 6. Percentage of students in schools where the principal reported assessments of students in national modal grade for 15-year-olds, PISA 2009



Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, OECD Publishing, Paris <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091559-en>.



## GOVERNANCE: AUTONOMOUS DECISION MAKING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Parliament decides on educational legislation and the government and the Ministry of Education and Culture prepare and implement education policy. Every four years, the government adopts an [Education and Research Development Plan](#) that outlines education policy priorities. Other bodies that help shape education policy are:

- The [National Board of Education](#) determines the national core curricula for pre-primary and basic education and general upper secondary education. It also determines national qualification requirements for vocational education and training and competence-based qualifications and evaluates learning outcomes.
- Until 2014, the Finnish Education Evaluation Council is responsible for external evaluations in basic education, upper secondary school education, vocational education, vocational adult education and liberal adult education, and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is responsible for educational evaluation of higher education. From 2014, evaluation will be responsibility of the Education Evaluation Centre (see Recent policies and practices, p. 12).
- ECEC responsibilities have been transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013). Up to 2013, the National Institute for Health and Welfare was responsible for drafting and implementing the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care.
- National Education and Training Committees and the National Coordination Group for Education and Training are expert bodies that plan and develop vocationally oriented education and training. Other advisory bodies include the Council for Lifelong Learning (an expert body within the Ministry of Education and Culture that covers issues related to education and working life, including lifelong learning and adult education), the Advisory Board for Early Childhood Learning and Care, and the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs.
- Representing key stakeholder groups are the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the Confederation of Finnish Industries, the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), the Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK), the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (Akava), the Trade Union of Education in Finland (OAJ), student unions, and education providers.

The Finnish education system is decentralised, and a significant level of authority and responsibility is at the **local level**, most commonly in municipalities or joint municipal authorities (according to Ministry sources, in 2013, there are 320 municipalities in Finland). Decisions in lower secondary schools are made at the local level, either by the local government or by the school, depending on how decision making is organised in the municipality (Figure 7). Local authorities have responsibility for organising basic education, making decisions on allocation of funding, designing and implementing local curriculum, and recruiting and training personnel. How much autonomy schools have is also determined by local authorities.

The [Universities Act](#) (2009) grants further administrative and financial autonomy to **universities**. Universities and the Ministry of Education and Culture have performance agreements defining operational and qualitative targets for each university. These provide a basis for decisions on the university's student intake, selection, curricula, and instruction. Polytechnics are either municipal or private institutions. Like universities, they also have performance agreements with the Ministry which include polytechnic-specific performance targets.

### The challenge: Ensuring capacity to deliver high quality education across all municipalities.

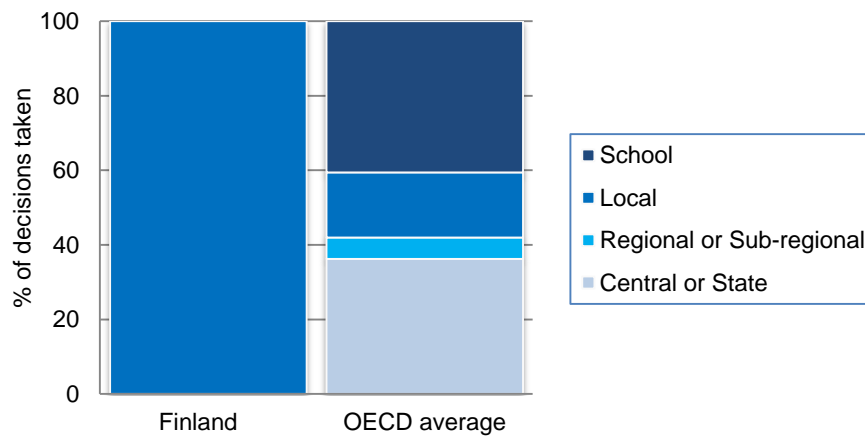
#### Recent policies and practices

A municipal reform (from 2012) aims to strengthen municipal and service structures and will reconsider the distribution of tasks between municipalities and the state. Education funding and the operational environment in basic education will also be reviewed.

The [Universities Act](#) (2009) grants further administrative and financial autonomy to universities, which operate as either independent corporations or as foundations.



Figure 7. Percentage of decisions taken in public lower secondary schools at each level of government, 2010



Note: For Finland, local level includes both local and school levels.

Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en>.



## FUNDING: MAINLY FROM PUBLIC SOURCES

Finland's **investment in educational institutions** is similar to the OECD average. Expenditure on educational institutions at all levels is 6.5% of GDP, slightly above the OECD average of 6.3% (Figure 8). Between 2005 and 2010, Finland increased spending by 0.5 percentage points (slightly above the OECD average of 0.4 percentage points). Almost all expenditure on educational institutions is from public sources (97.6%, compared to the OECD average of 83.6% in 2010). Private funding is marginal at all levels of education (except at the pre-primary level where it amounts to 9.9% of expenditure), and it represents at most 4.1% of expenditure at the tertiary level.

Finland spends comparatively more per full-time student than other OECD countries in lower secondary education and tertiary education, but comparatively less per student at other levels of education. The **annual expenditure per student** over all levels (from primary to tertiary education, including R&D activities) was USD 10 157, above the 2010 OECD average of USD 9 313. From 2005 to 2010, expenditure per student increased by 12% in primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (compared to the OECD average of 17%), while enrolment remained the same. In the case of tertiary education, expenditure per student increased by 18% (compared to the OECD average of 8%) while enrolment decreased slightly by 1% (compared to the OECD average of 13%). There are expectations of change, given predictions of lower proportions of young people as a result of demographic changes.

Pre-primary to higher education is free, based mainly on **public funding sources**. Most basic and general upper secondary education providers are funded by the state and local authorities. Municipalities receive funding according to a formula that balances the proportion of population and its socio-economic status; they decide democratically how to distribute funding across different areas, including education. Private institutions also receive public funding (with enrolment of 5% or less of primary and lower secondary students and 18% of upper secondary students). Pre-primary and basic education funding is included in statutory government transfers to basic municipal services, and the municipality can decide how funding is allocated. Funding for upper secondary education and VET is provided based on the number of students in each school and the unit costs per student.

In **tertiary education**, there are no tuition fees. Universities receive funding from the state and also do external fundraising. With the Ministry of Education and Culture, the university agrees on operational and qualitative targets which provide the basis for the resources needed. Polytechnics are funded by the government and local authorities and also have external sources of funding. Core funding provided by the government is based on unit costs per student, project funding and performance-based funding.

To ensure everyone has educational opportunities, **student financial aid** is designed to benefit a large proportion of students. Financial aid includes mainly study grants and housing supplements. Scholarships and/or other grants to households amount to 14.9% of public expenditure for tertiary education, above the OECD average of 11.4%. More than half of national students in first degree programmes in tertiary-type A education (54%), benefit from scholarships and/or grants.

### The challenge: Improving efficiency of funding in tertiary education.

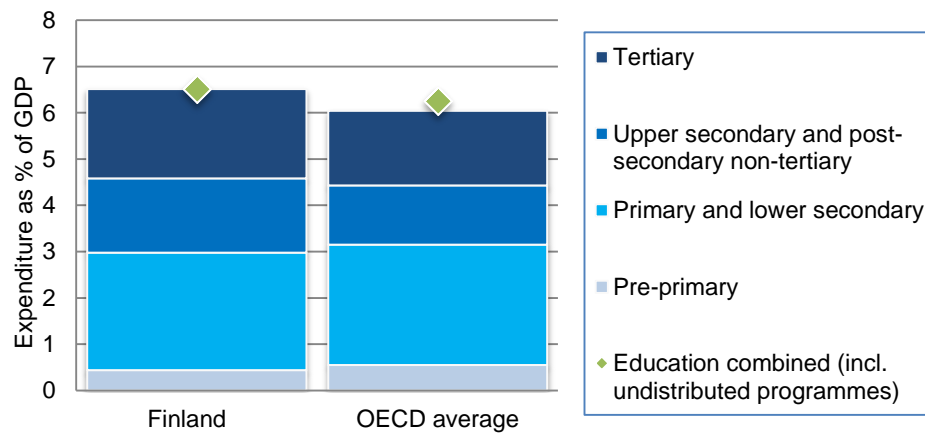
#### Recent policies and practices

According to the government programme, the [polytechnic reform](#) (2011-14) will transfer responsibility for polytechnic funding to the government and polytechnics will become independent legal entities. The reform aims to improve the quality and impact of polytechnics, and operating licenses of polytechnics will be revised, with emphasis on quality and impact. The reform is expected to take effect in 2014. Reform of the [student financial aid system](#) will be introduced (effective 2014) to accelerate completion of studies and strengthen incentives in financial aid to students.





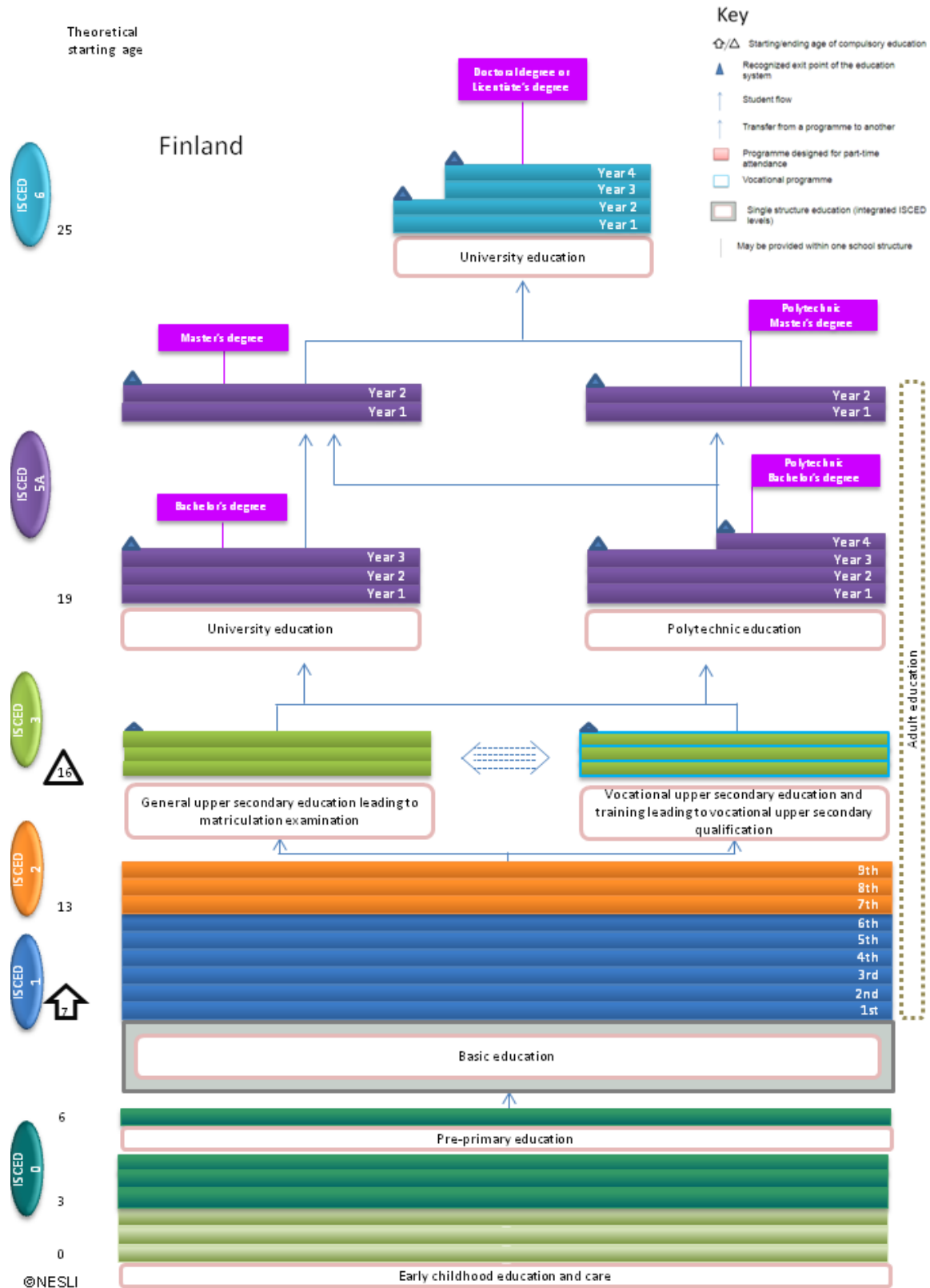
Figure 8. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, by level of education, 2010



Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>.



ANNEX A: STRUCTURE OF FINLAND'S EDUCATION SYSTEM





## ANNEX B. STATISTICS

#	List of key indicators	Finland	Average or total	Min	Max
<b>Background information</b>					
<i>Political context</i>					
1	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, 2010 (EAG 2013)	6.8%	5.8%	3.8%	8.8%
<i>Economy</i>					
2	GDP per capita, 2010, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs (EAG 2013)	36 030		15 195	84 672
3	GDP growth 2011 (OECD National Accounts)	2.7%	1.8%	-7.1%	8.5%
<i>Society</i>					
4	Population density, inhab/km <sup>2</sup> , 2010 (OECD Statistics)	17.6	138	2.9	492
5	Young people, aged less than 15, 2010 (OECD Statistics)	16.6%	17.3%	13%	28.1%
6	Foreign-born population, 2009 (OECD Statistics)	4.4%	14.1%	0.8%	36.9%
<b>Education outcomes</b>					
7	Mean reading performance (PISA 2009)	536	493	425	539
8	Change in mean reading performance, 2000-09 (PISA 2009)	-11	1	-31	40
9	Change in mean mathematics performance, 2003-09 (PISA 2009)	-4	0	-24	33
10	Change in mean science performance, 2006-09 (PISA 2009)	<b>-9</b>	3	-12	30
11	Enrolment rates in early childhood education and primary education, ages 3 and 4, 2011 (EAG 2013)	53.1%	74.4%	11.6%	98%
12	Population that has attained below upper secondary education, 25-64 year-olds, 2011 (EAG 2013)	16%	25%	7%	68%
13	Population that has attained at least upper secondary education, 25-34 year-olds, 2011 (EAG 2013)	90%	82%	43%	98%
14	Population that has attained tertiary education, 25-34 year-olds (EAG 2013)	39%	39%	19%	64%
15	Population whose highest level of education is vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary, 2011 (EAG 2013)	38%	33.5%	8.4%	73.9%
<b>Unemployment rates, 25-64 year-olds, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
16	Below upper secondary	11.3%	12.6%	2.7%	39.3%
	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	6.9%	7.3%	2.2%	19.2%
	Tertiary education	4%	4.8%	1.5%	12.8%
<b>Students: Raising outcomes</b>					
<i>Policy lever 1: Equity and quality</i>					
17	First age of selection in the education system (PISA 2009)	16	14	10	16
<b>Proficiency levels on the reading scale (PISA 2009)</b>					
18	Students below Level 2	8.1%	18.8%	5.8%	40.1%
	Students at Level 5 or above	14.5%	7.6%	0.4%	15.7%
<b>Between- and within-school variance in reading performance (PISA 2009)</b>					
19	Between schools	665	3 616	665	6 695
	Within schools	6 993	5 591	2 795	8 290
20	Students reporting that they have repeated at least a grade in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary schools (PISA 2009)	2.8%	13%	0%	36.9%



#	List of key indicators	Finland	average or total	Min	Max
21	Variance in student performance explained by student socio-economic status (PISA 2009)	8%	14%	6%	26%
22	Difference in reading performance between native students and students with an immigrant background, after accounting for socio-economic status (PISA 2009)	60.0	27	-17.0	85.0
23	Gender differences in student performance on the reading scale (PISA 2009)	-55	-39	-55	-22
<i>Policy lever 2: Preparing students for the future</i>					
<b>Upper secondary graduation rates, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
24	General programmes	46%	50%	18%	82%
	Pre-vocational/ vocational programmes	99%	47%	4%	99%
25	Change in upper secondary graduation rates (average annual growth rate 1995-2011), (EAG 2013)	0.3%	0.6%	-1%	3.6%
<b>Graduation rates, first-time graduates, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
26	Tertiary-type 5A	47%	40%	21%	60%
	Tertiary-type 5B	m	11%	0%	29%
	Tertiary-type 5A (average annual growth rate 1995-2011)	4.8%	4%	-1%	11%
	Tertiary-type 5B (average annual growth rate 1995-2011)	m	0%	-20%	14%
27	Youth population not in education, employment or training 15-29 year olds, 2011 (EAG 2013)	11.8%	15.8%	6.9%	34.6%
<b>Institutions: Improving schools</b>					
<i>Policy lever 3: School improvement</i>					
28	Index of teacher-student relations based on students' reports (PISA 2009)	-0.16	0	-0.42	0.44
29	Index of disciplinary climate based on students' reports (PISA 2009)	-0.29	0	-0.40	0.75
<b>Teachers younger than 40 years old, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
30	Primary education	39.1%	41%	15%	60%
	Lower secondary education	40.3%	39%	11%	56%
	Upper secondary education	26.6%	34%	7%	47%
<b>Number of teaching hours per year in public institutions, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
31	Primary education	680	790	589	1 120
	Lower secondary education	595	709	415	1 120
	Upper secondary education	553	664	369	1 120
<b>Ratio of teachers' salaries to earnings for full-time, full-year adult workers with tertiary education, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
32	Primary education	0.89	0.82	0.44	1.34
	Lower secondary education	0.98	0.85	0.44	1.34
	Upper secondary education	1.10	0.89	0.44	1.40
33	Change in teachers' salaries between 2000 and 2011 in lower secondary education (2000 = 100), (EAG 2013)	4.77%	16%	-9%	103%
34	Impact of teacher appraisal and feedback upon teaching, 2007-08 (TALIS 2008)	Not participating	33.9%	10.9%	69.1%
35	Teachers who wanted to participate in more development than they did in the previous 18 months, 2007-08 (TALIS 2008)	Not participating	55%	31%	85%
36	School principals' views of their involvement in school matters, mean index, (PISA 2009)	-0.61	-0.02	-1.29	1.03



#	List of key indicators	Finland	average or total	Min	Max
<i>Policy lever 4: Evaluation and assessment to improve student outcomes</i>					
<b>Assessment purposes (PISA 2009)</b>					
37	To make decisions about students' retention or promotion	94.4%	78%	1%	100%
	To monitor the school's progress from year to year	52.5%	77%	35%	98%
	To make judgements about teachers' effectiveness	23.7%	47%	8%	85%
	To identify aspects of instruction or the curriculum that could be improved	56.3%	77%	47%	98%
<b>Frequency and source of teacher appraisal and feedback, 2007-08 (TALIS 2008)</b>					
38	Once every two years or less	Not	35.8%	13.8%	65.6%
	At least once per year	Not	52.2%	27.6%	68.6%
	Monthly or more than once per month	Not	12%	3.3%	29.8%
<b>Systems: Organising the system</b>					
<i>Policy lever 5: Governance</i>					
<b>Decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2011 (EAG 2012)</b>					
39	Central or state government	0%	36%	0%	87%
	Regional or sub-regional government	0%	6%	0%	36%
	Local government	100%	17%	4%	100%
	School government	m	41%	5%	86%
<i>Policy lever 6: Funding</i>					
<b>Annual expenditure per student by educational institutions, for all services, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, 2010 (EAG 2013)</b>					
40	Pre-primary education	5 372	6 762	2 280	20 958
	Primary education	7 624	7 974	1 860	21 240
	Secondary education	9 162	9 014	2 470	17 633
	Tertiary education	16 714	13 528	6 501	25 576
<b>Relative proportions of public and private expenditure on educational institutions, 2010 (EAG 2013)</b>					
41	Public sources	97.6%	83.6%	57.9%	97.6%
	All private sources	2.4%	16.4%	2.4%	42.1%
	Public sources, index of change in expenditure on educational institutions (2000-10)	136	136	101	195
	All private sources, index of change in expenditure on educational institutions (2000-10)	159	211	104	790
<p><i>Note: The average, minimums and maximums refer to OECD countries except in TALIS where they refer to participating countries. "m" refers to data not available.</i></p> <p><i>PISA values that are statistically significant are indicated in bold.</i></p>					



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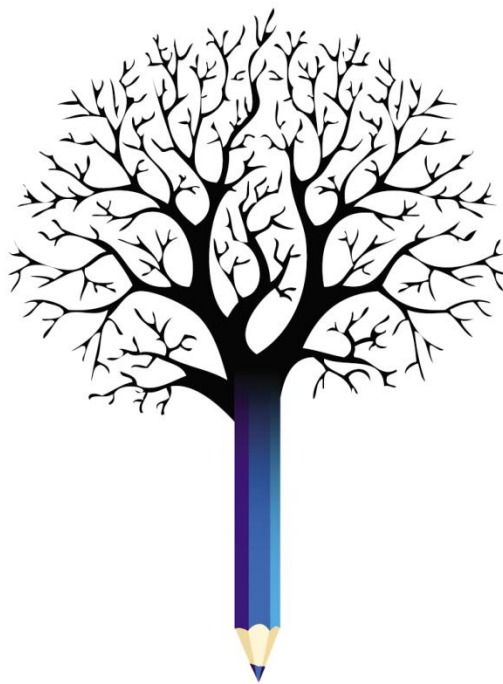


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