

Helsinki

School options in Helsinki for young people aged 7–15



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Welcome to Helsinki, the most effective place to learn!

Welcome to Helsinki, where every child has access to a high-quality education in their local school.

Regardless of where children begin their learning path, we are committed to meeting your family's unique needs and helping children discover their strengths. Our goal is to equip you with the knowledge and skills necessary for your child's education in an ever-evolving world.

We hope this guide serves as a valuable resource for you and your family when looking for a school in Helsinki. We encourage all parents and guardians to engage in open communication and collaboration with our schools, as we believe this is essential for a smooth learning experience. We are here to support you every step of the way, and we hope you and your family enjoy your time in Helsinki.

Education Division
City of Helsinki

Helsinki



10 Facts about basic education in Helsinki

1 Free education for 6 to 18-year-olds

In Finland, education is free for everyone between the ages of 6 and 18, at no personal cost. Compulsory education applies to all 6–18-year-olds. This includes books, school meals and all necessary school supplies. Pupils also get a balanced, warm meal every school day, free of charge. All that families need to purchase is a backpack, a pencil case and appropriate clothes for outdoor and indoor activities.

2 School starts at age 6 or 7

Before the beginning of comprehensive school, in the year the child turns 6, the child attends one year of pre-primary education. School starts in the year the child turns seven.

3 National and local curricula

All schools in Finland follow a national core curriculum that sets out the objectives and contents of the different subjects. Municipalities and the individual schools then draw up their own curricula within this framework. Teachers are free to design their own lessons and classroom teaching methods in this context.

4 The vast majority are public schools

Most of the schools in Finland are public schools run by the municipality. In addition, there are a handful of private and state-owned schools in Helsinki that operate independently. Most of the private schools serve a particular language group or have a special pedagogical or religious mission. These schools often have tuition fees and their own admission policies. We at the city call our public schools ‘local schools’.

5 Most children attend their local school

Most pupils in Finland go to the local school in their own neighbourhood. Each child in Helsinki is assigned a local school according to their home address and their school admission area. Local children often walk or bike to school, as the city ensures that the school journey is short and safe.

6 Official language in school is Finnish or Swedish

Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish, and so our schools are either Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking. Certain Finnish-speaking schools in Helsinki offer education in other languages, for instance fully in English or in two languages: half in Finnish and half in a foreign language.

7 Support for learning Finnish or Swedish

Children with no skills in Finnish or Swedish are offered a place in a group called 'preparatory education' to help them learn the basics of Finnish or Swedish along with their other school subjects. After studying in preparatory education for up to one year, children continue their education in a regular Finnish or Swedish-speaking classroom. Finnish or Swedish language studies will then continue throughout comprehensive school as 'S2 studies', aimed at pupils who do not have Finnish or Swedish as their first language or as 'S1 studies' for pupils with native-level Finnish or Swedish.

8 Foreign language studies

Children in our schools study at least two foreign languages. Every child starts learning their first foreign language in grade 1. English is the most common first foreign language studied in school. Studying the second national language, usually Swedish for Finnish-speakers and vice versa, starts in grade 6. Pupils can also study optional languages from the third and eighth grade onward. The language selections vary from one school to another.

9 Shorter school days

School days are relatively short compared to many other countries, and pupils have plenty of breaks between lessons. Every day, pupils enjoy games and play. Recess is spent outdoors, come rain or shine.

10 Healthcare and support for learning

Each school has their own healthcare and student welfare services that support the pupils' physical and mental wellbeing. School healthcare staff usually includes a school nurse, psychologist and social worker. Each pupil has the right to the support they need for learning, and in Helsinki, our aim to provide the children with support at their local school as soon as the need becomes apparent, at as early a stage as possible.

Before enrolling a child

When weighing your options, ask yourself the following four questions:

1. What are my child's language skills?

Learning a new language is always a challenge, but luckily it is a lot easier in the early years compared to adulthood. Knowing even a little Finnish or Swedish makes things easier, so we recommend taking on local language studies along the way.

- ▶ Even if your child cannot yet speak the language, they can still enrol in a Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking public school. In this case the child starts their school journey in a one-year programme focusing on learning Finnish or Swedish. We call this preparatory education. See more on page 12.
- ▶ If your child has previously studied in a fully English-language school, you can apply for the city's English-language basic education. The city also offers bilingual options taught half in Finnish, half in Chinese, English, Estonian, North Sami, Russian, Spanish or Swedish. See more on page 16.
- ▶ A handful of state-owned schools also offer education in French, German and Russian. These options are private, and not run by the City of Helsinki, but are introduced briefly on page 20.

2. How long do we plan to live in Helsinki?

Are we staying only for a short time, or do we aim to settle down for a longer period?

- ▶ If you're planning to settle in Finland, the best long-term choice is your local school, starting off with a year or so of preparatory education. If the child knows Finnish, bilingual education could be another suitable option. The longer your child spends in the Finnish education system, the more important it becomes to learn Finnish or Swedish.

Furthermore, by learning Finnish or Swedish, you can help ensure that your child's educational journey does not hit a wall after comprehensive school. Currently, options for studying in other languages after comprehensive school are very limited, and being proficient in a local language significantly eases the process and adds options for young people aged 15–18 who plan to enrol in upper secondary education.

- ▶ If you're here only for a short period, apply for basic education in a language of instruction your child already speaks.

3. Where do we want to live in Helsinki?

It may come as a surprise that your child must already have an address in Helsinki before they can be enrolled in school. This means you need to choose your new home before your child starts school. You can check the school admission areas and nearby services from the Service Map at palvelukartta.hel.fi/en.

Note that once you have registered your child's home address, you become Helsinki residents and, in Finland, all young people below the age of 18 must attend school, as they are of compulsory school age. In simple terms this means that they must go to school or enrol in homeschooling. If you instead move to a nearby city (Espoo, Vantaa), you should look for a school place from that municipality.

4. What are my child's needs and interests?

Discuss your plans together with your family. Ask your child about their interests and needs, such as if they prefer a school that may be farther away with an emphasis on a certain school subject such as math or music. These special emphasis classes are known as weighted curriculum (see page 18 to learn more). We call these special emphasis classes weighted-curriculum education.

Support for learning is guaranteed and comes at no cost in all public schools in Helsinki, so if your child needs additional support, enrolling in a public school is a good option.



Your options briefly

The options in this guide are divided into two categories: public schools run by the City of Helsinki, and other options that include private schools, state-owned schools, schools in nearby cities and home schooling.

Helsinki public schools

Schools that you can simply enrol at



Local school



Preparatory education

Schools that require separate applications and admissions tests that assess language skills or aptitude



Basic education in English



Bilingual education



Weighted-curriculum education

Other options



Private and state-owned schools



Nearby cities
Espoo and Vantaa



Home schooling



Public school near your home

Local school

Children who live in the city of Helsinki are automatically placed in a school in their neighbourhood. This process is called local school placement. Attending local school offers a great opportunity for your family to get involved with the everyday life at school and your neighbourhood.

The school that children go to is assigned to them based on their home address. Helsinki is divided into school admission areas, so some children's local school may not be the one closest to them. Find your local school with our school search tool hel.fi/schoolsearch.

Instruction in the local school is either in Finnish or in Swedish. Don't worry if your child does not know the language: you can enrol them in preparatory education. Preparatory education is introduced in the next chapter.

If your child already knows Finnish or Swedish and you want to enrol them in the local school, simply contact the school directly.

Language learning is an important part of local school

It is very common for pupils to study several languages at school. The younger the child is, the easier it will be for them to learn a new language. Each local school has their

own language programme. You can find each school's language selection on their website under 'language programme'. Use the School Search Tool to find a school website: hel.fi/schoolsearch.

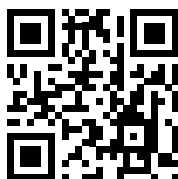
A few local schools have groups for English-enriched instruction. These groups study 10–25 per cent of the curriculum in English. There is no entrance examination for this programme, but the pupil must live in the school's admission area to be admitted to the school. Read more at hel.fi/enriched.

Children who are learning Finnish or Swedish as a foreign language can study Finnish or Swedish as a second language (S2 studies) first, before continuing to Finnish or Swedish language and literature (S1) studies.

If your family speaks a language that is not taught at school, Helsinki's public schools offer children optional mother tongue studies or home language studies. These classes are offered in more than 40 languages, based on demand. Your child may need to travel to another school for this instruction.

Read more about local school:

hel.fi/welcometoschool





A year of learning the local language

Preparatory education

Who is it for?

If your child doesn't know the local language well enough to enrol in a fully Finnish or Swedish speaking group, **preparatory education** is the best option. It is aimed at children who have recently arrived in Finland and do not know Finnish or Swedish. Preparatory education also provides a good foundation for pupils interested in enrolling in bilingual education studies.

Learning Finnish or Swedish in a preparatory group will help your child integrate into everyday life in Finland. Having the skills to study in Finnish or Swedish expands your children's opportunities to pursue different study paths and other options after they complete comprehensive education.

If you and your family are planning to stay in Finland for a longer time, knowing Finnish or Swedish is key when it comes to things such as further education, working life, and becoming a full member of the community.

What is preparatory education like?

A child spends up to one year in preparatory education. For one year, the focus is on learning Finnish or Swedish and getting to know the Finnish school system, while studying all the school subjects. Preparatory education follows its own curriculum, which steers the teaching and personal study plan is drawn up for each child.

After one year, the child transfers to a regular Finnish or Swedish-speaking classroom. If your child's language skills develop quicker than that, they can make this transition sooner. Each pupil follows a personal study plan based on their needs, previous studies and skills.

In grades 1–2 (age 7–8),

preparatory education takes place in your child's own local school, together with Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking children, with the school staff supporting their language learning. This is called inclusive teaching.

In grades 3–9 (age 9–16),

Finnish-speaking preparatory education takes place in their own groups that are available in several schools around the city. There are two groups: one for ages 9–12 and another for ages 12–15.

In Swedish-speaking preparatory education, all grades 1–9 are taught inclusively in your child's local school, together with the Swedish-speaking children.

Preparatory education is not just about language training. In addition to the Finnish or Swedish language, pupils in preparatory education study mathematics, science, physical education and arts. Pupils also attend integrated classes with the Finnish or Swedish-speaking pupils. This is an important part of integration and making social connections.

After preparatory education, your child will continue in the grade corresponding with their birth year.

How do I enrol my child?

In grades 1–2 (age 7–8),

preparatory education takes place in your own local school. To enrol in grades 1 and 2, fill in the enrolment form on page hel.fi/preparatory and contact your local school directly, once you have moved to Helsinki.

In grades 3–9 (age 9–17),

Finnish-speaking preparatory education takes place in separate groups that are not available in every school. The City of Helsinki will try to find a class as close to your home as possible. Fill in the electronic enrolment form on page hel.fi/preparatory once you have a permanent address in Helsinki and you know the moving date. The school will contact you directly once they have a place for your child.

Note: Depending on the number of applications and vacancies, it can take anywhere from one to five weeks for a child to be assigned a school place in preparatory education. Apply in good time to avoid long waits.

If you want to enrol a child in **Swedish-language preparatory education**, contact your local Swedish-speaking school directly. You can check your local school with the school search tool at hel.fi/schoolsearch or by contacting the Education Division's Service guidance team. See contact details on page 22.

Read more about preparatory education:
hel.fi/preparatory



Studying fully in English

Basic education in English

A couple of Finnish-language public schools in Helsinki offer basic education fully in English. Basic education in English means studying almost entirely in English. All pupils study Finnish language and literature as one school subject. Depending on their language skills, pupils study either Finnish as a mother tongue or as a second language.

What is basic education in English like?

The English-language classes are for children with native or near native-level English language proficiency. This is a good option for your child if you plan to stay in Finland for only a short period of time. To be eligible, your child must also have previously studied in English. For children in grades 1–7, no prior Finnish skills are required. Young people in grades 8 and 9, however, should have basic Finnish language skills.

Note: Bear in mind that options for English-language education in Finland after basic education are limited. That is why we recommend enrolling in your local school or a bilingual education programme, if you plan to settle in Finland. The city provides no-cost preparatory education that adequately prepares children for Finnish-language or Swedish-language schooling.

How to apply?

You can apply for placement in an English-language school by filling in the application and arranging for your child to take a language test. If you are applying to grade 1 or grade 7, the main admission is open for all interested applicants. In the case of all other admissions (supplementary admission for places that become available or continuous admission throughout the year), we recommend that you check the admissions criteria from the Helsinki website 'English-language basic education' before applying.

There are three different ways to apply, depending on whether your child already has a school placement in a Helsinki local school or not:

- 1. Main admission** is arranged each year for future first-graders (in January) and future seventh-graders (in December–January) who will be beginning studies in the school in the upcoming academic year. Children must have an address in Helsinki or a school placement at a local school to be eligible.
- 2. Continuous admission** for newcomers (open year-round, language testing once a month except for June–July). After a preliminary language test, the city can grant immediate enrolment, and the children can begin their studies without delay. This option is meant for children who have moved to Helsinki and have previously studied in English.



3. Supplementary admissions round for grade 1 placements that become available is an option for families who move to Helsinki after the main admission and are seeking possible placements that have become available (May–July, language test and enrolment in early August).

Note: The English-language education has limited availability; there are often more applicants than there are seats available. If your child doesn't get a place in an English-language class, you will still be granted a placement in your local school or in a preparatory education class. Alternatively, you can contact private schools or public schools in Espoo and Vantaa offering English-language education.

List of public schools offering basic education in English:

- ▶ Ressu Comprehensive School (grades 1–9)
- ▶ Maunula Primary School (grades 1–6)
- ▶ Maunula Secondary School (grades 7–9)
- ▶ Kulosaari Secondary School (grades 7–9)

List of private schools offering instruction in English, see 'Other alternatives' on page 20.

Read more about basic education in English:
hel.fi/english-basic-education



Studying in two languages

Bilingual education

In bilingual education, 25–50 per cent of the teaching is in a target language (Chinese, English, Estonian, North Sami, Russian, Swedish or Spanish) and the rest is in Finnish. Bilingual education is a great choice if your child wants to achieve strong skills in the target language but also develop full proficiency in Finnish. This will give your child more choices when planning their studies after comprehensive school.

Research shows that studying in two languages has many benefits. It develops problem-solving skills, creative thinking and adaptability. It can also support the learning of other foreign languages in the future.

What is bilingual education like?

The languages of instruction are Finnish and one of the following: Chinese, English, Estonian, North Sami, Russian, Swedish or Spanish. Each school decides independently how to include the instruction in the second language in its lessons. The goals and content of teaching in bilingual education are the same as in regular Finnish-language schools.

If your child is interested in enrolling in a bilingual class, but they don't have the required Finnish skills, they can first enrol in preparatory education and then apply to bilingual studies.

How to apply?

Apply in the main admission for grades 1 and 7, or through the supplementary admission in the spring. There is no language testing for first graders when applying to bilingual education. If there are more applicants than there are seats, admission is decided with a lottery system.

There is a language test for vacancies in grades 2 to 8 and the main admission for grade 7. The test measures your child's skills in both the target language and in Finnish.

There are three paths to enrol in bilingual education:

- 1. Main admission** for future first-graders (in January) and future seventh graders (in December-January)
- 2. Supplementary admission** for all applicants if all seats have not been filled during the main admissions. (Application period May–July, language tests in early August).
- 3. Continuous admission** for applicants who have previously studied in the bilingual education programme in another city and move to Helsinki in the middle of basic education (open year-round except June–July).

Public schools offering bilingual education

Available grades may vary between schools.
See the school website for more information.
Find schools at hel.fi/schoolsearch.

Finnish–Chinese

- Meilahti Primary School
- Meilahti Lower Secondary School

Finnish–English

- Aleksis Kivi comprehensive school
- Kulosaari Primary School
- Töölö Primary School
- Malmi Comprehensive School
- Laajasalo Comprehensive School
- Vesala Comprehensive School
- Kulosaari Secondary School
- Helsingin Uusi Yhteiskoulu Secondary School
- Töölö Secondary School

Finnish–Estonian

- Latokartano Comprehensive School

Finnish–North Sami

- Pasila Comprehensive School

Finnish–Russian

- Myllypuro Comprehensive School

Finnish–Spanish

- Käpylä Comprehensive School

Finnish–Swedish

- Nordic Comprehensive School

Read more about bilingual education:

hel.fi/bilingual



Emphasis on a certain school subject

Weighted-curriculum education

Weighted-curriculum education emphasises a certain subject or subject area. Some of Helsinki city's schools offer weighted-curriculum education. It starts in either grade 1, 3 or 7, and lasts until the end of comprehensive school. The options include subjects such as art, dance, sports, music and mathematics. Pupils studying in weighted-curriculum education may have 1–2 hours longer school weeks than their peers.

You can apply for placement in a weighted-curriculum class by filling in the application and arranging for your child to take an aptitude test. The test measures your child's aptitude for studying the emphasised subject.

How do I apply?

You can apply if your child is starting grade 1, grade 3 or grade 7 the following August. The application period is once a year in December–January. Schools with the same weighted-curriculum programme use the same aptitude test, so you can apply for several schools at once.

Anyone can apply for weighted-curriculum education and no previous experience of

the emphasised subject is required. Bear in mind that the weighted-curriculum class instruction and aptitude tests are in Finnish.

What subjects are available?

Currently, the options for weighted-curriculum education include digital visual arts, performance arts, visual arts, Latin, physical education, physical education and home economics, nature and science, mathematics, mathematics and natural sciences, media education, music, modern dance, art expression, dance, movement and expression, dance arts, technology education and communications.

Read more about weighted-curriculum education:

hel.fi/weighted





Other alternatives

Private and state-owned language schools in Helsinki

In addition to public schools run by the City of Helsinki, there are private and state-owned schools in Helsinki that offer instruction in different languages or education in alternative pedagogy. As these schools are not governed by the City of Helsinki, you should contact them directly if you wish to learn more.

Private language schools in Helsinki:

- Deutsche Schule Helsinki
- The English School of Helsinki
- European School of Helsinki
- Финско-русская школа, Finnish-Russian school
- International School of Helsinki
- Lycée franco-finlandais d'Helsinki

See full list of private schools in Helsinki:



Options in other cities

You can also check what the neighbouring cities of Espoo and Vantaa have to offer. Distances in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area are relatively short and commuting to work and school is usually quite easy and convenient, thanks to our good public transportation system.

Espoo

- Espoo International School
- Kivimies international school

Vantaa

- International School of Vantaa
- Kaivoksela school
- Rekolanmäki school



Home-schooling

In home-schooling, the parent or guardian is responsible for ensuring that the child meets the goals set for comprehensive education. You can teach your child yourself or hire a teacher. Either way, in home-schooling your

child should study the same subjects and core content as pupils in Finland's schools. Your municipality monitors your child's progress during their 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.

Read more about home schooling:



Get in touch

Daycare and Education Guidance for International Families

For daycare and education guidance in Finnish and English, please email or book an online appointment with us. We are happy to help!

Email: eduguidance@hel.fi

Education Division Advisory Services

Contact our advisory services with any questions you may have about the city's schools, daycares or education services. Service representatives serve walk-ins at street address Työpajankatu 8 in the Kalasatama district on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10–12 and 13–15. You can also book an appointment ahead of time by phone.

Telephone: +358 9 310 44986

Email: koulutusneuvonta@hel.fi

Feedback and enquiries: hel.fi/feedback

Useful links

- Learn more about us on the city's website pages
hel.fi/en/childhood-and-education
- Is your family new in Helsinki?
We have helpful information just for you!
hel.fi/en/childhood-and-education/tips-for-newcomers
- The InfoFinland website has information on the Finnish education system in 12 languages
infofinland.fi/en/education



Helsinki



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Up-to-date information at hel.fi/welcometoschool and on the schools' websites