

Introduction to Finnish Education System

Paula Ratava

Advisory Teacher for Sustainable Future
Educational and Cultural Services



OULU

8.9.2025



Special features of the Finnish education system

- The Finnish society has a positive attitude towards education.
- Finnish teachers are highly educated and strongly committed to their work.
- Only the core curricula are designed for nationwide application.
- A great deal of attention is paid to individual support for pupils' learning and wellbeing.
- Multi-professional cooperation is applied in order to further improve our schools.
- The nature of the evaluation of learning outcomes at schools is encouraging and supportive.
- Finland has an efficient library system of very high quality.



Kuva: Hiukkavaaran koulu, Oulun kaupungin mediapankki

[Source: Ministry of Education and Culture](#)

Finnish Education Policy

- Finnish schools have a high degree of **autonomy** in pedagogical and curricular practices.
- Finnish teachers have considerable degree of **decision-making authority** as concerns school policy and management.
 - deciding which courses the school should offer
 - choice of textbooks and other teaching material
 - determining course content
 - establishing student assessment policies
 - allocating budgets within the school



Administration from top to bottom



Ministry of Education and Culture

The National Agency for Education

Local Administration (cities and municipalities)

ECEC Centers, Schools and Heads

ECEC and School Staff

Accountabilities within the curriculum process

NATIONAL LEVEL

- Ministry of Education and National Agency for Education
- Education Acts and Decrees and Education Policy Guidelines
- Development Plan for Education and Research
- National Core Curriculum

EDUCATION PROVIDER LEVEL

- Educational Authorities of a City or a Municipality
- Strategic Leadership and Management
- Local Organization, Resourcing, Monitoring and Development
- Decisions on the Local Curriculum

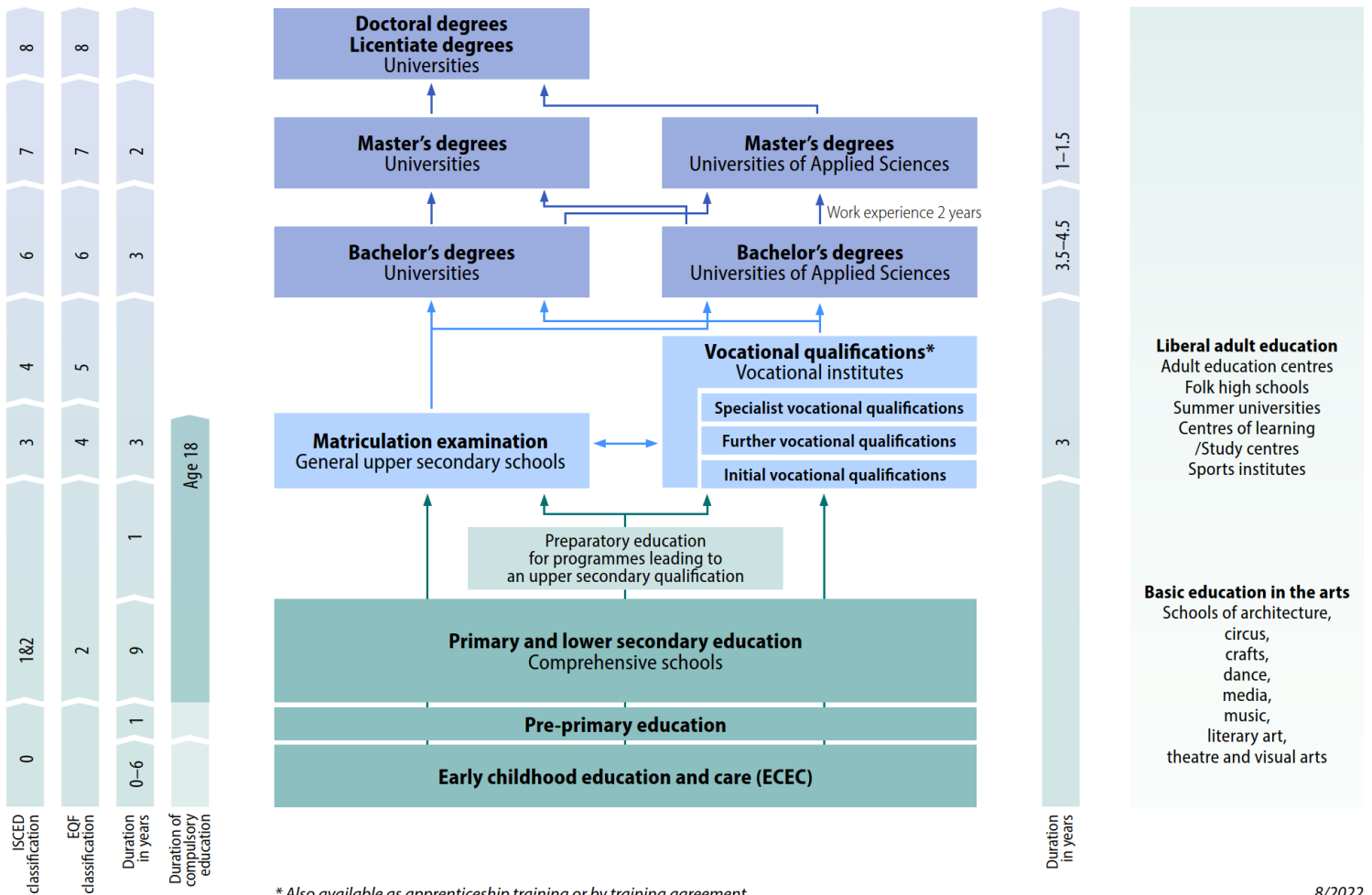
SCHOOL LEVEL

- Heads and Management Teams
- Pedagogical Leadership
- Goals Leading the Development of School Culture
- Realization and Implementation of the School-Based Curriculum

Finnish Education System

- Most education and training is publicly funded.
- Compulsory education starts at the age of 6 with pre-primary education and ends at the age of 18 or earlier after completion of an upper secondary qualification.
- There are no tuition fees.
- In basic and upper secondary education school materials and meals are free of charge.
- Focus on learning – the only national examination is the matriculation examination in the upper secondary school.
- No dead-ends preventing progression to higher levels of education.

EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FINLAND



Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

- It supports the development, learning and wellbeing of children.
- It combines education, teaching and care in a systematic and goal-oriented way.
- It emphasizes equal treatment of children and giving due weight to their views.
- It builds the foundation for life-long learning.



**Artistic experiences
and self-expression**

PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE



Exploration



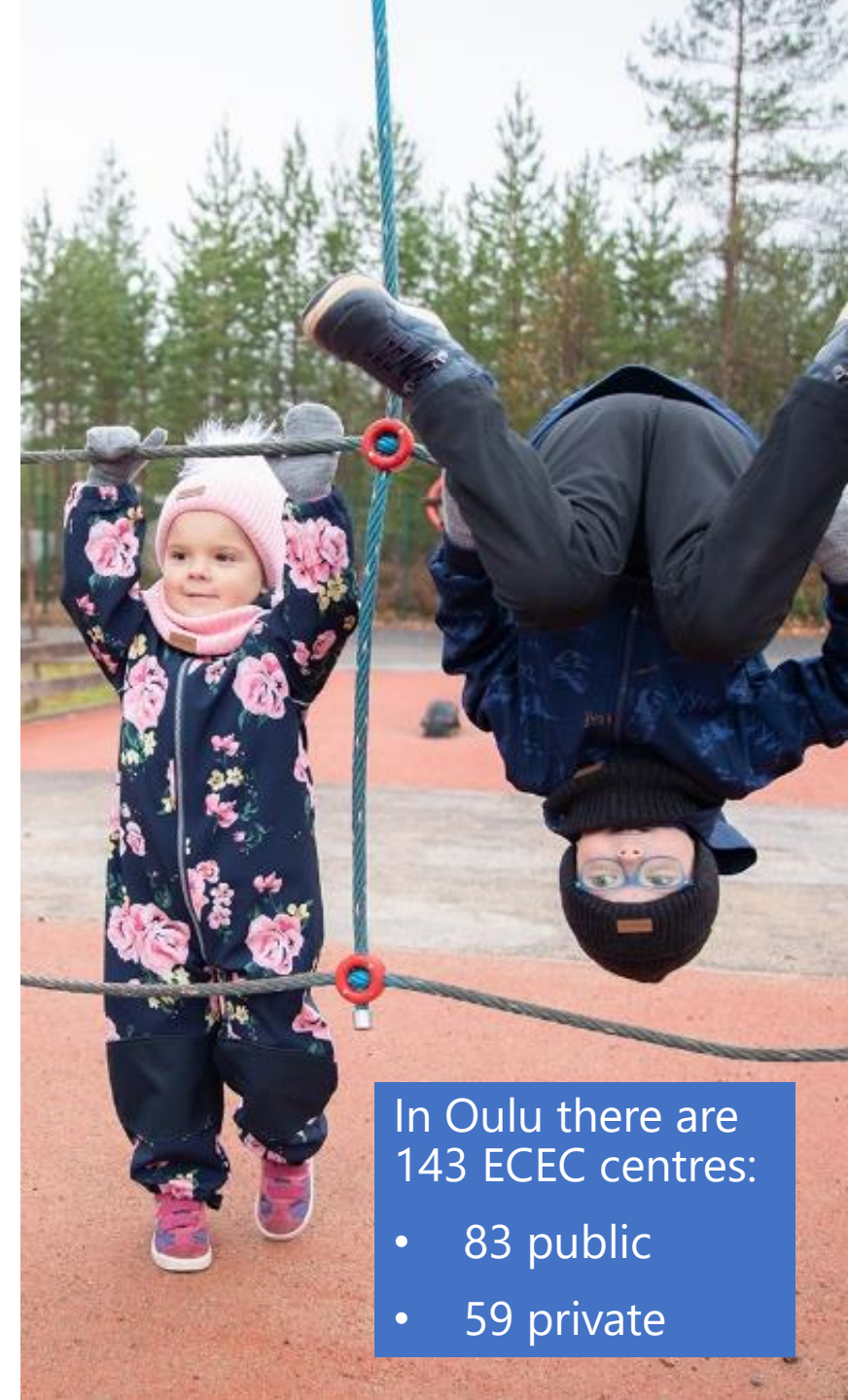
Playing



Physical activity

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

- All children under the school age (7 years old) have a subjective right to Early Childhood Education and Care.
- The parents of the child decide whether or not their child participates.
- Local authorities (cities and municipalities) are responsible for providing it.
- Services can be organized by public or private service providers.
- ECEC is provided at ECEC centers (the most common form) or as family daycare in private homes or as clubs or playground activities, either with full-day or part-time participation.
- The staff-child ratio in ECEC centers is 1:4 for children under the age of three and 1:7 for children between the ages 3-6.
- ECEC is strongly supported by taxes. A fee is charged for early childhood education and care. The fee is based on the family's income and size, and on the time the child spends in ECEC. In the fall 2025 the fee charged for ECEC ranges from 0 € to 311 €.



In Oulu there are
143 ECEC centres:

- 83 public
- 59 private

Pre-primary education

- Pre-primary education is compulsory for all six-year-olds.
- It is free of charge including meals, materials and daily health and welfare services.
- It is provided in ECEC centers or schools.
- It is 4 hours/day in a pre-primary group with a kindergarten teacher, who has MA in early childhood education.
- The group may include at most 13 children if there is one teacher or at most 20 children if there is another adequately trained adult besides the teacher in the group.

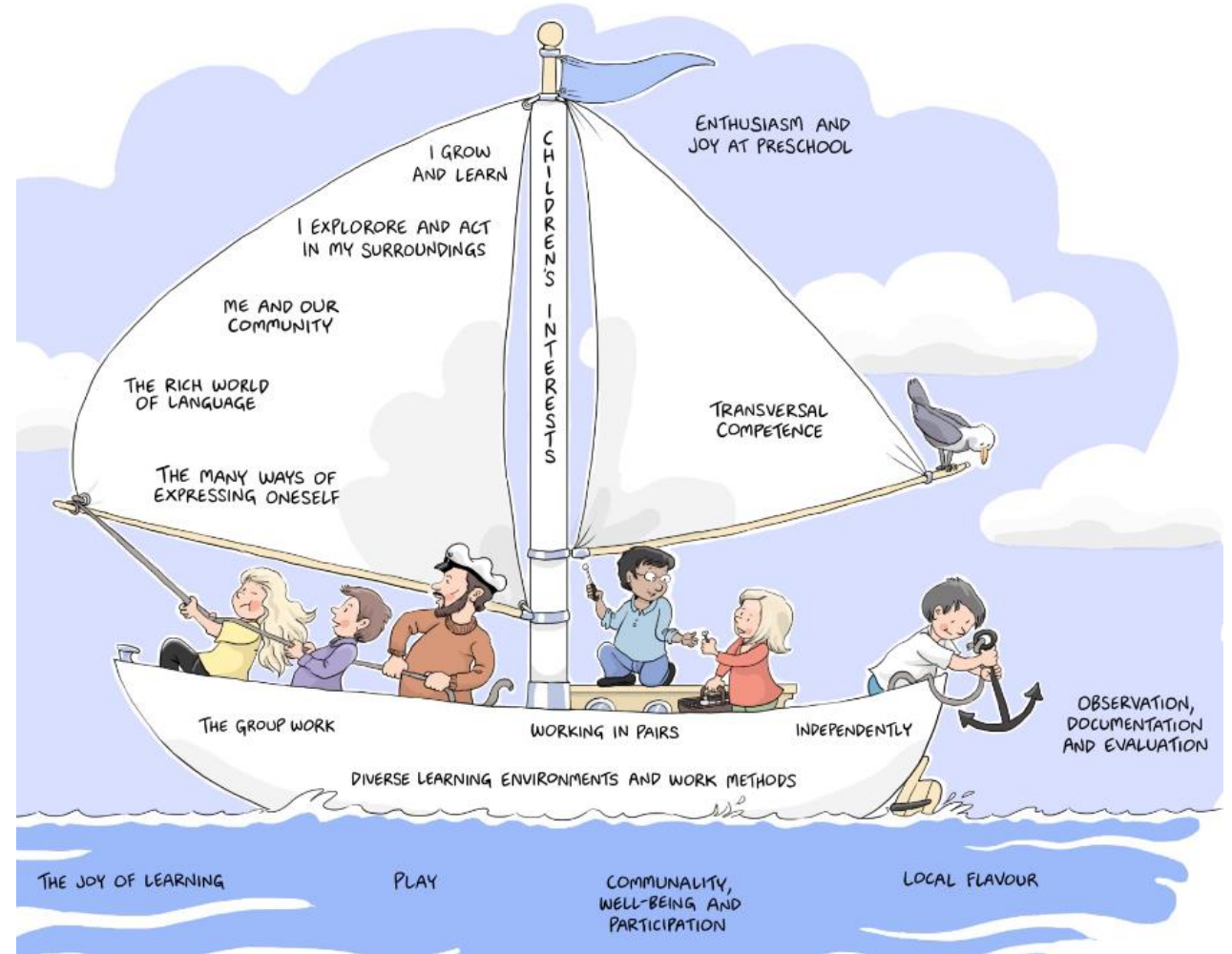


Kuva: Oulunsalon päiväkoti, Oulun kaupungin mediapankki

Pre-primary education

- It lasts for one year providing a continuous learning path from ECEC through pre-primary education to basic education.
- There are no universal standards or learning goals for the level of knowledge to be reached, instead, personal learning goals and plans are set for every child.
- Purpose is to improve children's opportunities for learning and support their growth through play-based learning.
- Teaching is not divided into school subjects.
- Teaching is organized according to themes or phenomena that last for different periods of time and are implemented in different ways.

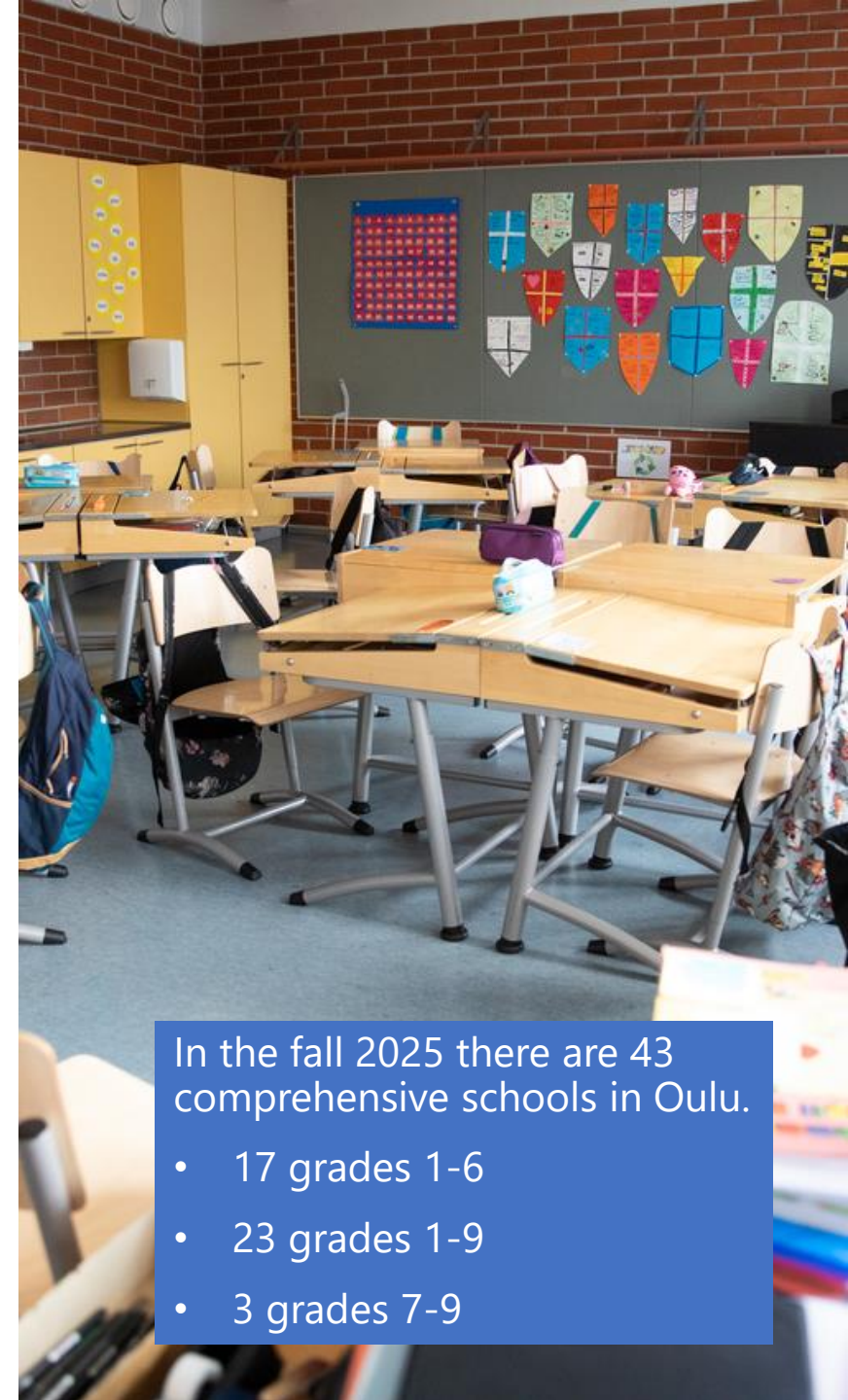
THE OULU CURRICULUM FOR PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION



Comprehensive or Basic Education

- It starts on grade 1 and ends at grade 9.
- It is compulsory and there are no admission requirements.
- It is free of charge providing materials, school meals, healthcare and welfare services and transportation if students live very far from school.
- In primary education, grades 1-6 study with a class teacher.
- In lower secondary education, grades 7-9 study with specialized subject teachers.
- Instruction is arranged in schools near home.
- Less than two per cent of primary and lower secondary school pupils go to a private or state school.

[Click here to see a video on four facts about Finnish comprehensive education.](#)



In the fall 2025 there are 43 comprehensive schools in Oulu.

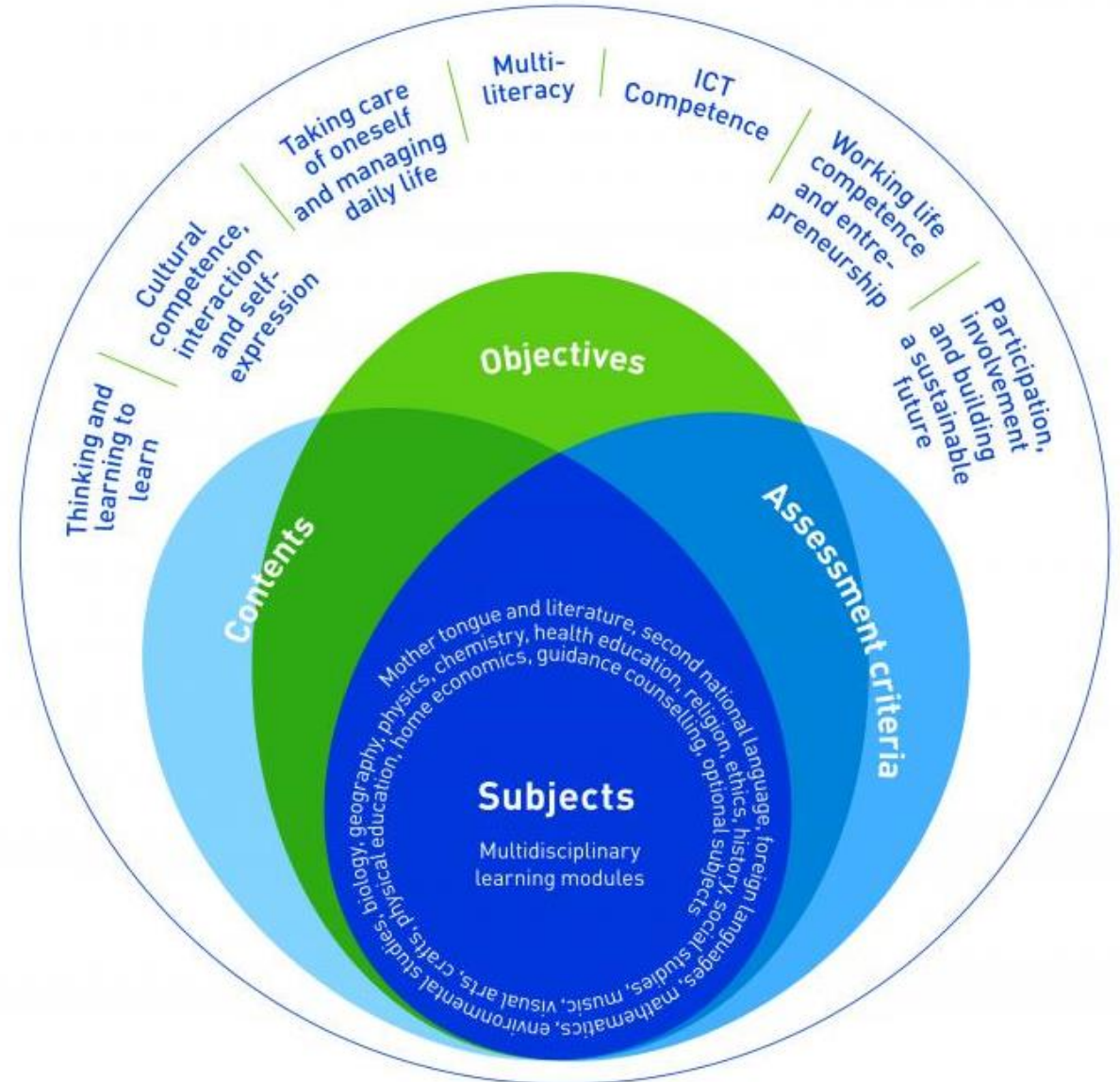
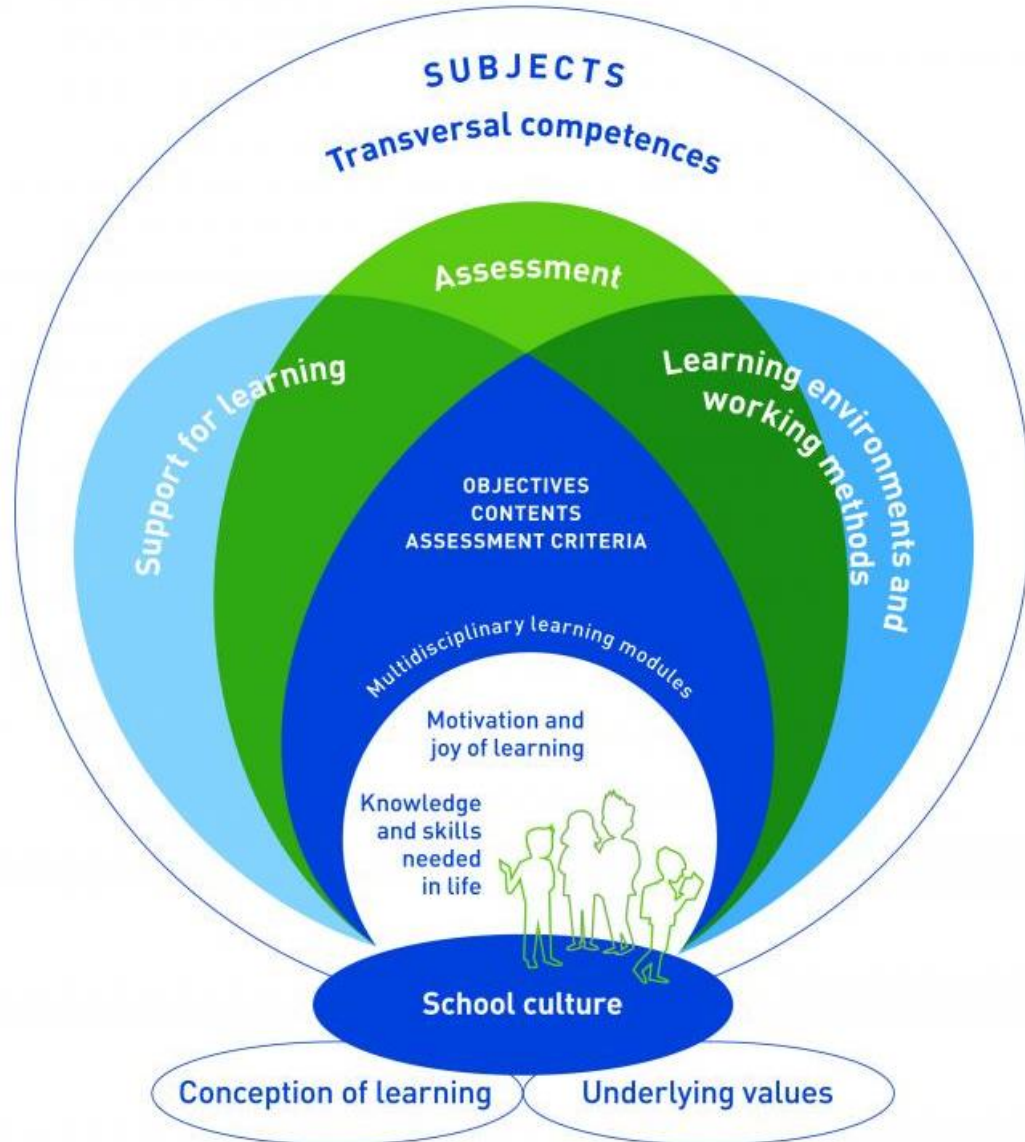
- 17 grades 1-6
- 23 grades 1-9
- 3 grades 7-9

Comprehensive or Basic Education

- The school year has 190 working days during fall and spring semesters from mid-August until the end of May.
- The minimum number of lessons per week for students varies from 20 to 30. The minimum number of lessons for class teachers is 24 and for subject teachers between 18 and 24 depending on the subject.
- The length of the school days is amongst the lowest in the world in Finland.
- The amount of homework is low compared to other countries.
- The average class size is 20 students.
- Special education is usually closely integrated into normal teaching and is highly inclusive by nature.
- Interruption and repeating a year grade is rare.
- Almost all Finnish children complete comprehensive school (in Oulu 99,6 %).
- Gives no official qualification; final certificate is granted for acceptable completion of the curriculum.
- Provides eligibility for all upper secondary education.



Curriculum for basic education



Upper secondary education

- At the end of comprehensive school, each learner must apply for post-comprehensive school education.
- This means applying for general upper secondary education or vocational education and training.
 - In the city of Oulu there are 10 general upper secondary schools.
 - In Oulu, Vocational education and training is provided by private education providers or organizations formed by multiple municipalities. The vocational institutes in Oulu are e.g. OSAO, OPAO, Luovi and SDO.
- For students needing more time, support and preparation before starting upper secondary education a one-year Preparatory Education for Upper Secondary Qualifications program is provided by Oulu Upper Secondary School for Adults or OSAO Oulu Vocational College.
- Compulsory education ends at the age of 18 or earlier after completion of an upper secondary qualification
- Graduates of general upper secondary or vocational education can apply for further studies at universities or universities of applied sciences.



Kuva: Oulun kaupungin mediapankki

General Upper Secondary Education

- Provides general education and does not qualify students for any particular profession.
- Around 37 000 new students start in general upper secondary education every year.
- General upper secondary education usually takes three years to complete.
 - The progress of studies is not tied to year classes.
 - The student defines one's own progress rhythm.
 - Completion in 2 to 4 years is also possible.
 - Studies can be combined with vocational education to receive dual qualifications.
- At the end of general upper secondary school, students take a national school-leaving examination known as the Finnish Matriculation Examination.
 - Mother tongue (mandatory)
 - At least three other subjects such as foreign language, mathematics, sciences or humanities
- Passing the examination gives eligibility to apply for further studies at universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational institutes.



Kuva: Oulun kaupungin mediapankki



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