



Indoor air problems in schools in Finland

Suomen
Vanhempainliitto
NoKo 23.9.2019

Indoor air problems at schools

A study (2018) conducted by the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) and University of Helsinki found that the awareness and concern held by the parents of children regarding possible indoor air problems increased the reporting of symptoms in indoor air questionnaires.

Indoor air questionnaires aimed at building users are conducted widely in Finland.

About nine percent of all pupils in Finnish schools study in temporary buildings because their schools are too small or under repair. (48,000 children in grades 1-9)

Why to worry about indoor air problems at schools?

The pupils report various symptoms like headache, smarting/hurting eyes, eczemas, fever, problems with stomach and joints, asthma.

“Depending on the length of the exposure, children in schools with the worst indoor air quality may get marks as much as one grade lower on average than pupils in schools with the best indoor air,” says **Ulla Haverinen-Shaughnessy** from THL.

Riina Länsikallio from the Trade Union of Education in Finland (OAJ) agrees that pupils must be removed from schools with internal air problems. However moving can also be problematic, Länsikallio says.

“There is a risk that educational achievement declines as interim facilities usually include just the basic provisions. We have received feedback that mobile buildings often suffer from heating and ventilation problems.”

The major
problems in
Suomen
Vanhempainliitto's
point of view:

The municipalities don't tell parents about the suspected indoor air problems in school, before the problems are serious.

The children live at serious risk of health. Many of them experience loss of friends as they have to change school or study alone because of they experience symptoms or illnesses in a consequence of indoor air problems.

Often the children have to study home alone with their parents, because a clean enough school buildings are not found in their municipalities. They don't get enough support for studies.

Parents don't get medical help for their children. The municipalities refuse to handle their illness as a consequence of the school indoor air problems.

Suomen Vanhempainliitto's activity:

Discussions with The National Health and Welfare institute / Terveet tilat 2028 (Healthy Buildings 2028 -program). Statements on guidelines for municipalities.

Discussions with The Indoor Air Working group of the Parliament. Statements on law preparations.

The local parents associations try to influence in childrens well-being and rights to learn in a healthy environment: honest information on the conditions of schools / support for children with symptoms, illnesses and absences because of illnesses.

The Indoor Air problem Network of Non-governmental organizations (The Organization of Respiratory Health, The Trade Union of Education in Finland, OAJ, trade Unions of nurses)



PROGRAMME OF PRIME MINISTER ANTTI RINNE'S GOVERNMENT 6 JUNE 2019

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FAIR, EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE FINLAND

Objectiv 2: Promoting a child and family-friendly society

- Towards an equal and child and family-friendly Finland with a strategy for children
 - A parliamentary committee will be appointed to prepare **a national strategy for children** based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
 - Its task will be to formulate a vision for a child and family-friendly Finland that spans government terms and crosses administrative boundaries.

FINLAND THAT PROMOTES COMPETENCE, EDUCATION, CULTURE AND INNOVATION

Objective 1: The level of education and competence among the population will rise at all levels of education, differences in learning outcomes will decrease, and educational equality will increase

- In order to improve learning outcomes and tackle inequality, we aim to introduce an action plan for quality and equality in comprehensive school education.
- We will advocate the learning of basic skills during the early years by reconfiguring preprimary education and the first two years of primary school into a more coherent system that allows pupils to move flexibly to the next level after they have gained the required basic skills.
- As part of this approach, we will examine the possibility of providing pre-primary education over a two-year period.

FINLAND THAT PROMOTES COMPETENCE, EDUCATION, CULTURE AND INNOVATION

Objective 1: The level of education and competence among the population will rise at all levels of education, differences in learning outcomes will decrease, and educational equality will increase

- We will support the development of management systems and competence at schools. We will commit to the long-term development and funding of comprehensive school education and to the implementation of the curriculum.
- We must secure equal opportunities for pursuing individual learning pathways. We intend to do this by funding positive discrimination, encouraging more flexible teaching and providing adequate support. We will reinforce the position of schools as community hubs and advocates of wellbeing.

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- We will also examine the effectiveness of the legislation on special needs teaching, including the principle of inclusion contained in that legislation and the allocated resources. We aim to approach these subjects from various perspectives; for example, how equality of students is realised and how teachers are coping.
- We will include teachers, researchers and families in the long-term development of comprehensive school education.

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Objective 1: The level of education and competence among the population will rise at all levels of education, differences in learning outcomes will decrease, and educational equality will increase

- We must pay particular attention to the growing inequality recognised within and between schools, in larger towns, between regions, in learning outcomes between genders, and among first and second-generation immigrant children and young people.

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Objective 1: The level of education and competence among the population will rise at all levels of education, differences in learning outcomes will decrease, and educational equality will increase

- **We will raise the minimum school leaving age to 18 years.** With this in mind, we plan to introduce a range of study and support options for compulsory education, such as voluntary additional primary and lower secondary education, folk high schools, workshops, rehabilitation and preparatory education, which may be included in the range of upper secondary qualifications. However, compulsory education cannot be extended unless the fees for upper secondary education are abolished. As part of preparing for the extension, we will investigate the reasons why students discontinue their upper secondary education and take the appropriate measures to address them. We will also carry out a study on non-fee-paying upper secondary education and a reduction in learning material costs and, based on that, take the appropriate measures to implement upper secondary education that is genuinely free of charge

FINLAND THAT PROMOTES COMPETENCE, EDUCATION, CULTURE AND INNOVATION

Objective 2: Children and young people will feel well

- We will guarantee every child and young people a genuine opportunity to pursue a leisure activity of their choice as part of the school day. We plan to create a **Finnish version of the Icelandic model**. We intend to reinforce and improve the quality of the schools' morning and afternoon activities, clubs and cooperation with the municipalities and third-sector providers. We will launch preparations for promoting free-of-charge leisure activities during the school day.

FINLAND THAT PROMOTES COMPETENCE, EDUCATION, CULTURE AND INNOVATION

Objective 2: Children and young people will feel well

- We will further develop our healthy, communal and ecological school meals and, as part of our work to reorganize the school day, explore the possibility of providing a snack.
- We will reinforce a collaborative culture in schools and the role and influence of students in school communities. We will have a zero tolerance rule against bullying and will offer school staff and students training for recognizing and tackling bullying. We will also pay attention to preventing and recognizing discriminatory bullying. We aim to extend the identified best practices nationally and secure the continuation of effective projects.