

SCHOOL  
BEGINS

—welcome!





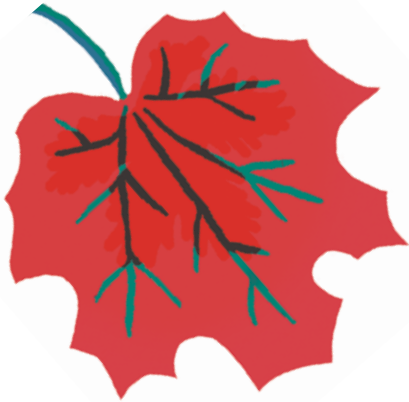
## For the Reader

Starting school is a momentous and exciting occasion, not just for your child, but for you as the parent as well. You may be reminded of your own schooldays and wonder if your child will feel comfortable and thrive in school. What will their teacher be like? Will school be challenging or not challenging enough for your child? How will they cope in a large group where some children are quiet and shy and others find it hard to stay put? Will all the other children have new, expensive phones or have none at all? How will your child fit in?

You do not have to worry. The classroom can fit all types of children and everyone will be able to find their place.

As the parent of a schoolchild, the best thing you can do is adopt a positive and confident attitude towards your child's education and the school. Schools have changed since your schooldays. To get an accurate impression of the school today, be interested, curious, and do not be afraid to ask questions if there is something about school occupying your mind. You are the most important role model for your child. Your positive attitude towards school is reflected on your child. Your experiences at school do not have to define your role as the parent of a schoolchild.

We hope that this brochure will provide you with thoughts and ideas on how to encourage your child to ensure the best possible first steps along their school path.



## The School Today

Even without realizing it, many parents may assume that the school of today is the same as it was during their schooldays. You might picture desks organized in straight lines and remember the dictation tasks repeated each week. The school might still look the same, but today there are also classes where the children work on their assignments lying on the floor, learn to read using tablets or work on math exercises outside. The school is changing and that is a good thing. The world around the school is also changing and schools must keep up with the development.

In Finland, teachers are able to work relatively independently within the classroom, making their own decisions regarding teaching methods as long as they stick to the curriculum. Therefore, the everyday life at the school may seem to vary between schools. Some teachers provide a schedule with all the different subjects specified, while others may use less rigid scheduling where each school week is different. The parents must have the courage to trust the teacher and ask questions if something is unclear or occupying your mind.

In the school of today, teaching consists of units. At the school, we try to see how the various things that are learned relate to each other, instead of studying just one subject at a time. This is known as integrative approach. It is the school's duty to teach various skills that benefit the children in the future. Among others these include *ICT Competence and multiliteracy* (the ability to interpret, produce, and

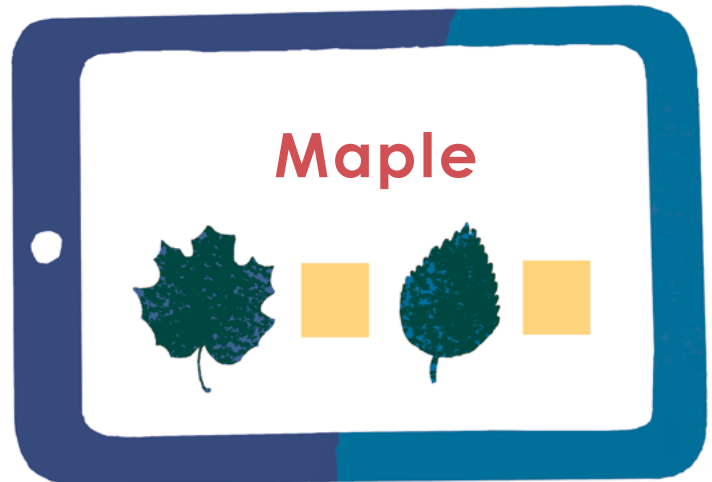


evaluate different types of texts and information). These skills are practiced differently within each subject.

The involvement of pupils and parents is emphasized at school. Both the pupils and parents can participate in the planning and assessing of the school's activities as well as the discussion of values. To ensure that the parents have a voice at the school, this opportunity should be appreciated and utilized in parent evenings, for example.

The pupil assessment at the school has also changed. Today, the assessment focuses more on the learning process and is encouraging and diverse. The pupils also learn to assess their own learning and that of others. The most significant function of the assessment is to support learning. Numbers are only included in school year reports in later years and schools use a lot of oral feedback and verbal assessments.


More information about the teaching and the functioning of the school can be found in the curriculum which is usually provided on the school's website and presented to the parents at school.





## Trust Between the Home and the School

- A trust between the home and the school increases the wellbeing and safety of the child at school. Never criticize the school in front of your child.
- Trust will grow when there is enough interaction between the home and the school and we listen to and appreciate each other's opinions.
- A trust between the home and the school has a positive influence on the child's learning and success at school.



Previously, it was thought that the school handled education and the home was responsible for upbringing. Today, the importance of parental involvement is emphasized together with the partnership between the home and the school. When the home and the school see eye to eye, work together and support each other, the children feel better at school and the everyday life at schools is safer.

Effective and confidential cooperation between the home and the school can help the child learn better and enjoy the time spent in school. The trust between the home and the school becomes stronger when the parents and the school personnel can meet often enough and become familiar with each other. Discussions can help us better understand the views of others.

A trust between the home and the school requires an active and open dialogue. Trust cannot be created without sufficient meetings or other forms of communication between the home and the school, or if the communication is lacking. As a parent, be active and keep in contact with the school, but do remember to respect the teacher's working hours and find out when and how to best reach the teachers.

Sometimes your child may share things related to school that might seem strange at home. You should always listen to your child and take what they say seriously, but at the same time you should keep in mind that it may be hard for a child to perceive large entities. If you are left with doubts, do not hesitate to contact the school to find out their side of the situation. It is important to refrain from criticizing the school or teachers in front of your child as this can weaken your child's trust in the school.

What games did you play at recess today?

What made you laugh today?

What was the best thing at school today?

## Participation

- **The most important method of participating in your child's education is to ask them questions about their day at school, encourage and support them and help them with their homework.**
- **When you show interest in the school, you demonstrate the importance of school to your child.**
- **By actively participating in the parents' association of the school or parental activities for your child's class you become familiar with the functioning of the school and get to know the teachers and other parents.**

Your attitude towards the school, particularly when your child is younger, influences the way your child views the school. When you show interest and talk about the school in a positive manner, you show your child that school is important, thus making it important to them as well.

The parents' association or parental activities related to the class are natural ways of actively participating at school. However, all parents do not have the opportunity to participate in these activities. The most important thing to do is to show interest and strive to take part in parent evenings, meetings or assessment discussions. Through participation you can show your child that you value their education.

What made you happy at school today?



What was boring to you today?

What did you learn today?

How did you help others at school today?

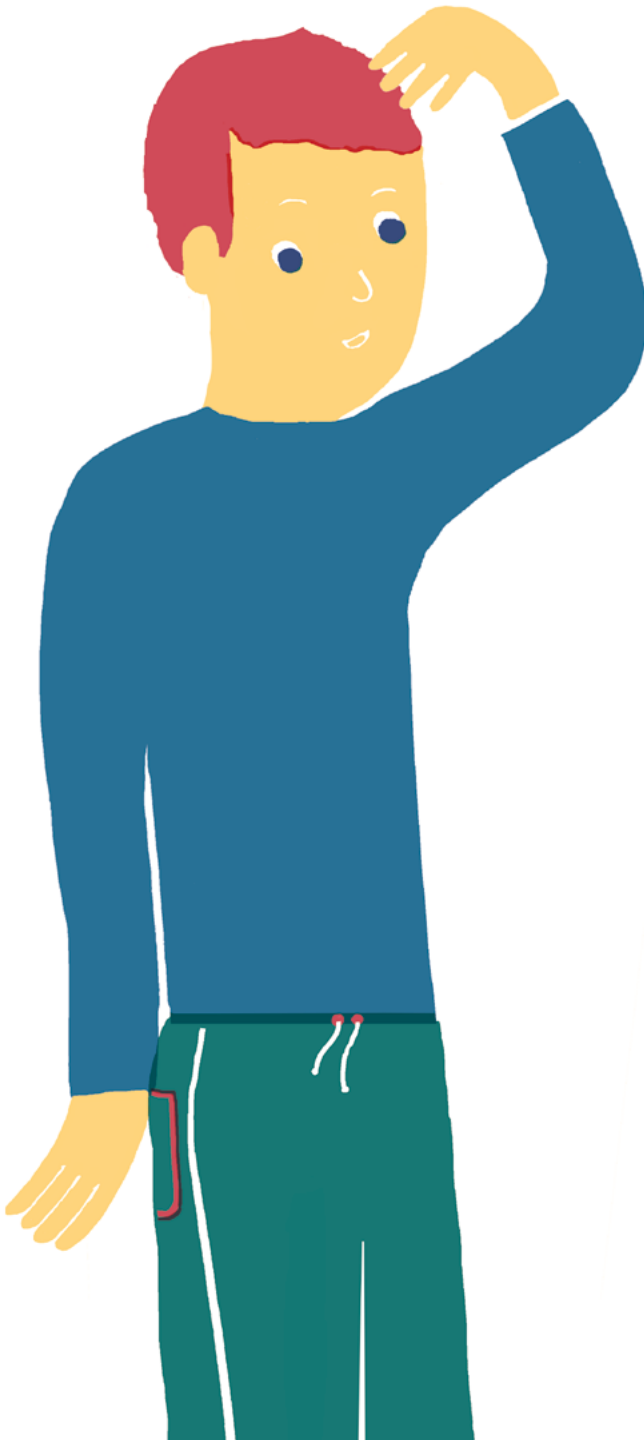
#### **BE PRESENT AND PARTICIPATE:**

- Visit the school on a regular school day. This will give you an idea of the everyday life at school and make it easier to discuss school with your child. Parents are entitled to visit the school during regular school days as well.
- Take part in meetings with the teachers, parent evenings, and other events organized by the school.
- Think of different ways of asking your child how their school day was.
- Do not hesitate to contact a teacher directly if there is something on your mind. This can provide quick answers to your questions.
- Join the parents' association or take part in parental activities.
- Provide positive feedback to the school. Positive feedback can help teachers cope with their work. It also strengthens the trust between the home and the school.



# Supporting Your Child's Education

- Focus more on the work your child does than the results. *"You did really well to finish even though it was hard."*
- Show that it is OK to fail. It is important that your child also learns how to deal with failure and adversity.
- Do not think that your child has a problem if they are struggling with something. Instead think that there are skills that your child should practice and show them that you encourage and support them while they practice.



Parents are usually happy to encourage their children in their hobbies. Similarly, children also need their parents' encouragement and support in school. It does not matter what type of a pupil you were. Regardless of their own success at school, all parents are capable of supporting their child's schoolwork.

You should know that schools today place more emphasis on study skills and work than the results. Children should also be allowed to fail – we learn from our mistakes. It is important to prevent creating an atmosphere where the child is afraid of failure. If the fear of failure is stronger than the possibility of success, the child may give up without having the courage to even try.

Striving and tenacity affect the result. If you found math hard when you were in school, you can understand if your child does not like math. But that should not be used to excuse your child from even trying. Positive expectations support your child's confidence. Your child needs support, encouragement, and praise as well as demands and instructions in equal measure.

If you notice that your child is having difficulties related to learning or social skills, do not hesitate to contact the school. The child is entitled to support for learning and education. The support must be available immediately as the need arises and must continue for as long as it is required. In addition to special needs teachers, schools also have school social workers and/or school psychologists and school nurses you can contact if you want to discuss matters related to your child's learning and education.

**TIP!**

**Avoid saying:**

"I can't help you, I'm so bad at math" or "I also didn't like Swedish when I was in school".

**Instead say:**

"We'll get through this together" or "This is interesting, I can also learn new things".



## Friendships

- For your child to feel comfortable in the class room, ALL children in the class should feel comfortable. Therefore, it is important to consider the manner that birthday parties are organized in, for example, and on what basis classmates are invited to the party.
- Get to know the other parents and children in the class. This will create a community around the class, which prevents exclusion and bullying.
- Discuss friendships and how to treat other people with your child. Provide a good example by refraining from criticizing your colleagues in front of your child, for example.

To ensure that your child feels well at school, they should be comfortable in class, feel safe, and find friends. As school begins, the class builds community spirit and practices social skills. So, do not worry if your child does not start to study new things immediately. It is also important to support the child in building positive social relationships at home. As a parent, you can participate in developing and building a good class spirit. To create a working community within the class, the children must learn to be flexible, cooperate, and adjust their behavior. Even small children are



responsible for the wellbeing of their classmates and as the parent you can support your child in assuming this responsibility. For example, you can teach your child to treat all the other children in the class nicely and include everyone in their games. Ask your child regularly what kind of a friend they are to others. To ensure that a child feels comfortable in a group and is accepted they must practice following the rules. For example, they must learn to lose, let others also make decisions, and wait for their turn.

At school, your child will get to know all kinds of children. It is important that the parents do not control who the child can play with. Instead, invite the children from the class into your home and see how they play together. Birthday parties are important to children and no one wants to be left out. Try to think of alternative solutions if you cannot invite the whole class into your home. Maybe more than one child in the class has a birthday around the same time and you could organize a joint birthday party in a community space or at the home of another child with more room. The most important thing is to make sure that no child is left uninvited.

Children are individuals and some may find it more difficult to adapt to the working methods of the class. Teachers are bound by confidentiality and thus cannot mention a child's special needs, for example, without the parents' permission. If your child has special needs, you should discuss them with the other parents and the children in their class, with the child's consent. This will help the others to understand why the child may sometimes see a special needs teacher, have a personal teaching assistant or work on different assignments than the other children.





**Bullying**

- **Bullying occurs in all schools from time to time.**
- **Bullying is usually a group occurrence.**
- **Bullying can be effectively counteracted by parents working actively to improve the wellbeing of the children in the class.**

Many parents are worried about their children being bullied or bullying others at school. Bullying may occur in all schools, just as it does in workplaces. Both bullying and anti-bullying measures have changed from when you were in school. The internet and smartphones have introduced new forms of bullying and bullying can follow the children home. On the other hand, bullying is recognized better than previously in schools today. The schools should intervene immediately if there are suspicions of bullying. They should also actively engage in preventive work against bullying. An active approach to improving the wellbeing of the children in the class taken by the parents is an effective way to prevent bullying. Bullying can be prevented when the parents interact with each other and speak positively about the other parents and their children. As the parent, you provide an example on how to treat other people. Children whose parents denounce bullying are rarely bullies themselves. They also have the courage to intervene if they see someone else being bullied.

- Bullying means a situation where one or more persons are repeatedly targeted negatively (mentally, physically or verbally) by one or more persons.
- Bullying is rarely done by a single person. There are almost always others involved as sidekicks or supporters.
- Bullying among children may be left unnoticed by adults.
- Children who are bullied may not always share their experiences with adults, because they may be ashamed or believe that they have deserved it.
- Always contact the school if you find out that your child or another child in the class is being bullied.
- Do not defend the behavior of your child if you find out that they bully others, but instead help them to stop bullying.

# Homework



- **At home, create favorable conditions and routines for doing homework.**
- **Encourage your child to take responsibility of their homework. Take the role of a supporter, being available when you are needed.**
- **Contact the teacher if homework is too difficult, takes up an unreasonable amount of time or often leads to conflicts at home. This way you can work together to find solutions that work for your family.**

In the first grade, children are often excited about homework because it signifies that they are in school. Homework is important as it teaches children to take responsibility of their schoolwork. Homework is used to revise things learned in school. Homework also provides the parents an idea of what the child is learning at school.

Some children may have learned from older siblings that doing homework

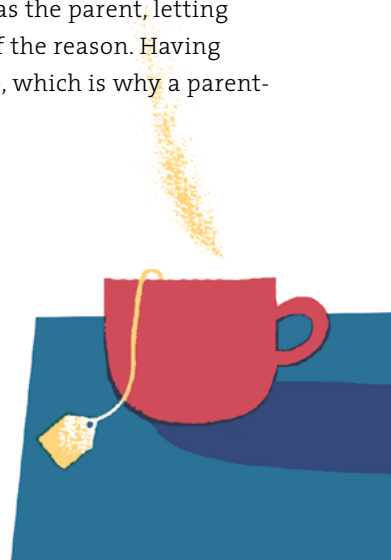


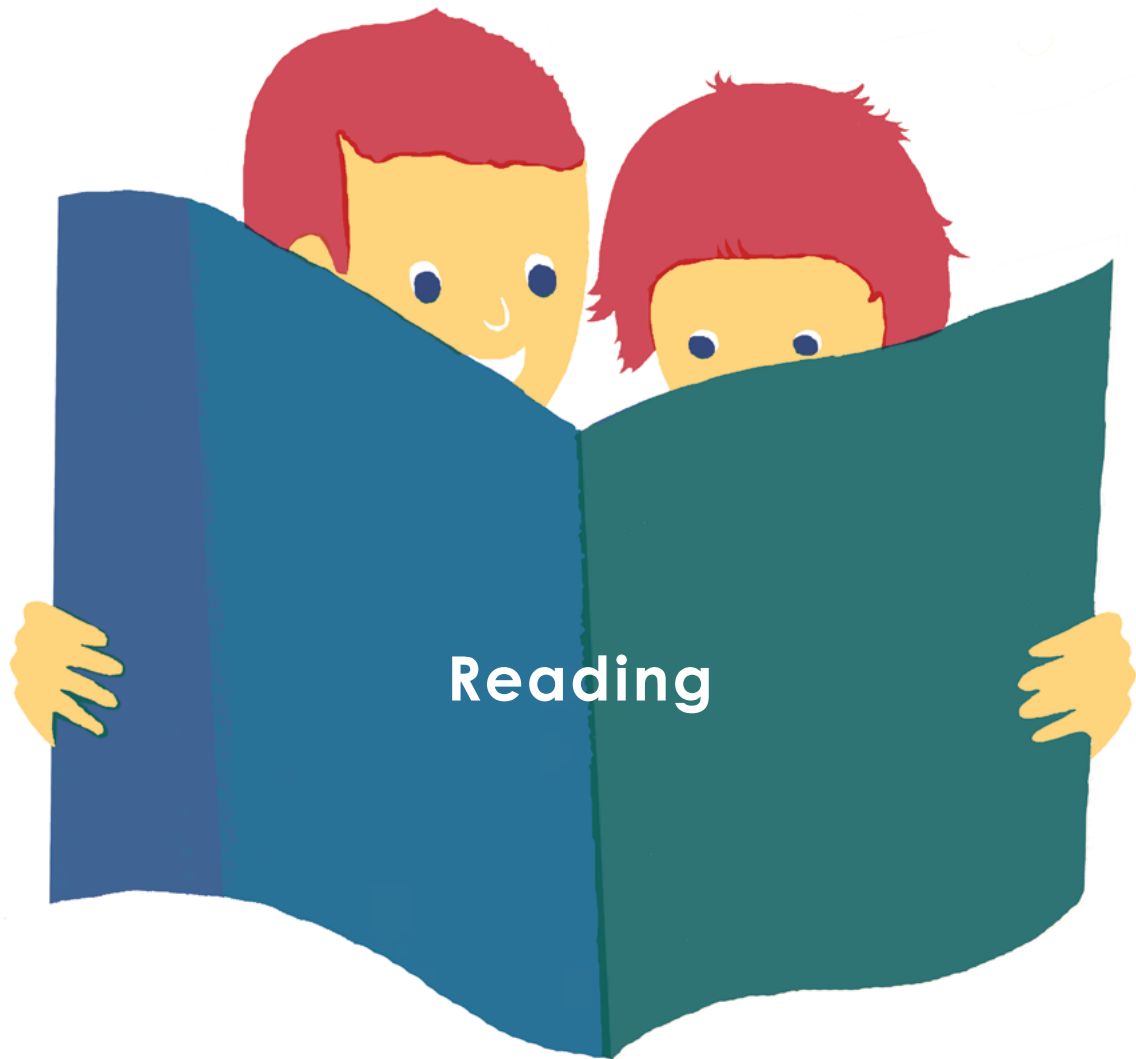
is boring. Some may struggle with their homework more than other children for various reasons. Regardless of the situation of the child, it is recommended to create a routine for doing homework. Think about where and when homework should be done. Having a snack and exercising before doing homework may help your child to focus. Multitasking – doing several things at once – makes it more difficult to concentrate and do homework.

Homework is intended to provide a way to practice things learned in school, so the children should primarily complete the work themselves. As a parent, you do not need to be a teacher. It is enough that you show interest and make yourself available when your child needs help. In the lower grades, homework is also used to practice reading and here the parents play a significant role. It is the parent's duty to listen, support, and encourage, as reading provides the basis for all other learning.

As a general rule, doing homework should not take longer than half an hour in the first grade. If homework begins to take up unreasonable amounts of time, contact the teacher. The homework may be too difficult for the child or the child is too tired to complete it. In this case, you should trust your assessment as the parent, letting your child leave the work unfinished and notify the teacher of the reason. Having homework destroy a child's school motivation benefits no one, which is why a parent-teacher dialog on homework is important.

It may be that the child gets tired of school and their motivation decreases when the novelty of beginning school passes and the fall gloom sets in. Books are thrown into a corner, while the child is irritated and tearful and may feel that everyone else is doing better than them. In this situation the parents must be patient and understanding. You should discuss the situation with the teacher. You can also talk to other parents and find out how their children are coping with homework. Peer support from other parents may be helpful.





- **Literacy is the foundation of all learning.**
- **Keep reading aloud to your child even after they have learned to read themselves. Reading aloud develops the child's reading abilities and vocabulary.**
- **Read magazines, go to the library, and discuss books. By doing these things you set an example for your child.**

The ability to read well is one of the most important tools used in school. As a parent, you can do a lot to develop your child's ability to read. Reading does not only affect your child's skills related to the mother tongue and literature, but provides a key to all learning. Reading develops the child's vocabulary and improves their verbal aptitude, reasoning, and problem-solving skills.

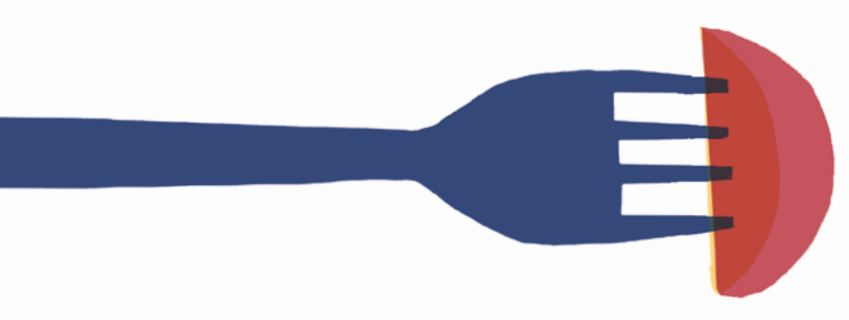
Keep reading aloud to your child daily even after they have learned to read. For example, you can take turns reading aloud. Reading aloud develops your child's vocabulary more effectively than normal discussions. Reading aloud provides the child with an opportunity to understand their feelings and those of others as they can empathize with the characters in the book.

### Fact File

- **80% of our vocabulary originates from printed media.**
- **The vocabulary of a 7-year-old includes approximately 5,000–7,000 words**
- **A 17-year-old who has regularly read and/or listened to texts has a vocabulary of approximately 50,000–70,000 words.**
- **A 17-year-old who has not read or listened to texts has a vocabulary of approximately 15,000–17,000.**

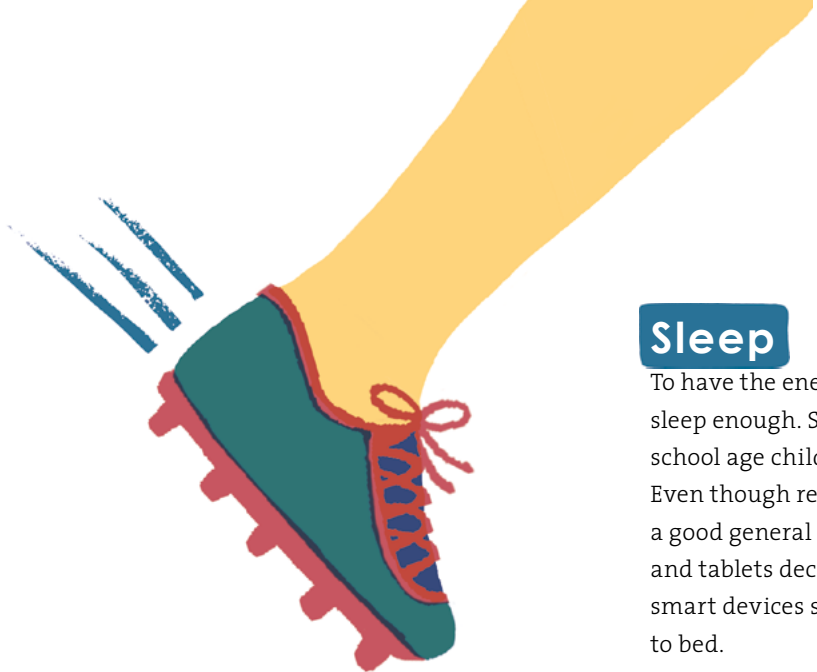
When reading aloud, it is best to use your mother tongue even if it is not the language your child uses at school. Provide a good example and make sure that your child sees you reading. If you encourage your child to read without even touching a book yourself, the child receives conflicting messages.

Do not stop reading aloud after your child has learned to read. Reading aloud is good for children of all ages and provides a way for your child to become familiar with literature they are not able to read themselves yet.



## A Healthy Lifestyle Supports Education





## Exercise

To ensure wellbeing, a child needs three hours of exercise per day, of which at least one hour should consist of energetic physical activity (for example running, skiing, climbing or swimming). Children, like adults, should not sit still for longer than an hour. Many schools have forgone the traditional desks and allow the children to work standing up or even lying on the floor, for example. Varying working positions and physical activity support learning, concentration, and memory. They also improve motor functions and prevent diseases.

## Sleep

To have the energy to go to school, children need to sleep enough. Sleep also affects learning. Elementary school age children need ten hours of sleep per night. Even though requirements vary individually, this is a good general rule. The blue light emitted by phones and tablets decreases the quality of sleep and thus smart devices should be set aside well before going to bed.

## Food

To get through the school day, a child needs enough energy. Breakfast is important, even though there are individual differences in how much children eat in the morning. The quality of the food at Finnish schools is usually good and first-graders are very happy to eat at school. The older pupils may sometimes be more critical towards school food, but it is important that the parents do not unnecessarily engage the children in their criticism. It is important that the pupils learn to appreciate the food they are provided at school free of charge. If a child complains of hunger in the afternoons, they can take a fruit as a snack to school, for example.

# SCHOOL GLOSSARY

**Governing Board** – A decision-making body that guides the functioning of the school in some municipalities. The Governing Board includes representatives of the parents and the school personnel.

**Student association** – All schools must have a student association that is responsible for promoting the inclusion of pupils in school communities. The student association consists of pupils selected from different classes in the school.

**Student welfare** – Student welfare is responsible for promoting mental and physical health and social welfare in the school community.

**Basic education** – Education from 1st to 9th (10th) grade provided by comprehensive schools.

**Inclusion** – Each child must be provided the opportunity to go to the school nearest to them regardless of possible learning difficulties, disabilities or diseases. The child must be provided with sufficient support measures at their school.

**KiVa** – An anti-bullying program, which is used in many Finnish schools.

**Contact parent** – A parent who volunteers to promote a good environment in the class and maintains communication with the teacher and other parents.

**Study materials** – All material used in teaching, such as books and electronic study materials.

**Curriculum** – A document that guides the functioning of the school. A national curriculum is created approximately every ten years, based on which the local curriculums are created. The curriculum consists of a general section and subject-specific sections. The subject-specific sections describe the age-group-specific contents and objectives of each subject.

**Senior volunteers** – Older people (for example grandmothers or grandfathers) who volunteer to assist the teacher and the pupils in the classroom once a week, for example.

**Unqualified teacher** – A person who does not have the degree required from a qualified teacher. They may have experience of working as a teacher.

**Special needs teaching assistant** – A person who guides and supports the pupils with school, assisting the teacher. The special needs teaching assistant may operate throughout the whole school, in a single class or as the personal assistant of a pupil who needs special support.

**School social worker** – A social worker at the school, who helps and supports pupils with their growth and development and provides assistance and support in crisis situations.

**Distribution of lesson hours** – Describes how the time reserved for teaching is divided amongst the various subjects.

**Three-step support** – A name used for the classification of the support for learning and education. Support is divided into general, enhanced, and special support.

**Education provider** – The body that organizes the basic education for the children in the area. This is usually the municipality, but can also be the state or, for example, a foundation.

**Finnish National Board of Education** – A government agency that is responsible for the development of teaching.

**Assessment discussion** – An event where the pupil, teacher, and the parents of the pupil discuss aspects of the child's education, such as their school satisfaction or progress.

**Wilma/Helmi** – An electronic application used as a means of communication between the home and the school and where, among other things, the units completed by the child are recorded.

This brochure is intended for parents whose children are beginning school.

The parents' interest, support, and encouragement for a child's education has a significant effect on the child's attitude towards school and learning

Cooperation between the home and the school and active support from the parents:

- improve the child's learning and school success
- ensures that the child enjoys the time spent in school
- strengthens the relationship between the pupil and the teacher
- develops the child's social skills



Hem och Skola

Suomen

VANHEMPAINLIITTO



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