

New national core curriculum for basic education: focus on school culture and integrative approach

The national core curriculum for basic education has been reformed. The core curriculum provides a common direction and basis for renewing school education and instruction. The work at national level was led by the Finnish National Board of Education in an open process. All relevant stakeholders were closely involved in the process. In addition the wider public were also invited to comment on the drafts.

A curricular reform is always preceded by a renewal of the distribution of lesson hours, which states the minimum statutory lessons to be taught in different subjects. The main changes in the new distribution of lessons hours are that the number of lessons in arts and crafts were increased considerably during the nine-year basic education. Lessons in civics and history also increased. The number of lessons in religion and ethics decreased.

The common compulsory subjects are stated in the Basic Education Act. The national core curriculum defines the objectives and core contents of each subject. In addition the core curriculum defines the objectives for the learning environment as well as principles for guidance, support, differentiation and assessment.

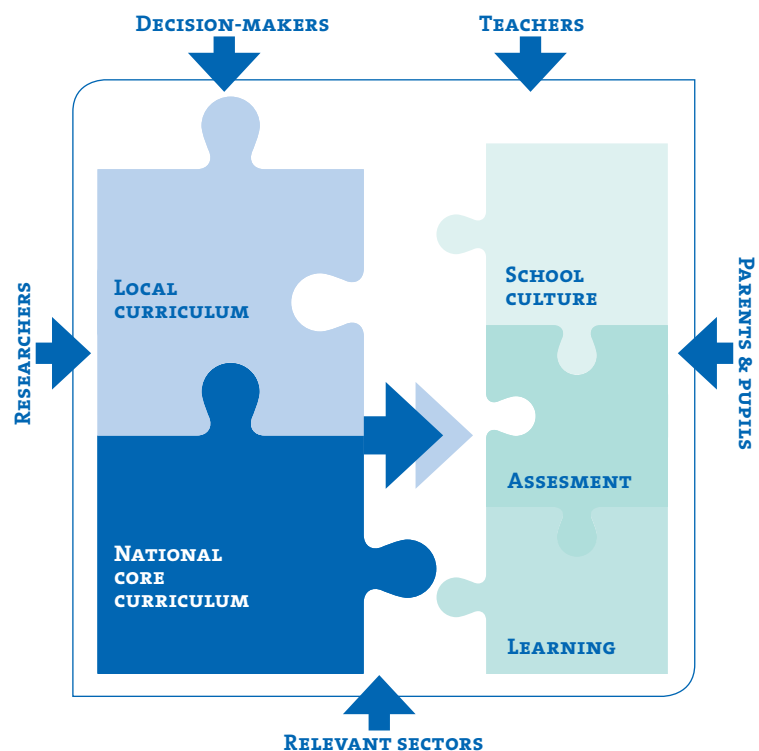
Education providers, municipalities and private education providers, draw up local curricula and annual plans on the basis of the national core curriculum. The local curricula will be implemented in autumn 2016. The local curricula comple-

Local curricula complement the national core curriculum with local emphases

ment the objectives, core contents and other aspects related to instruction with local emphases. The needs of the pupils, local specificities as well as results from self-evaluation and development work are taken into account.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF PUPILS, MEANINGFULNESS, JOY OF LEARNING AND INTERACTION IN FOCUS

In the curricular reform reflection on the changes in the surrounding world and their effect on children and young people, learning school work and life skills played an important part. The school must take these changes into



account, not just by reacting to change but also by taking a proactive role in building the future. The schools also have an important role in defining what kind of future they should be involved in constructing.

Answers were sought to the question on how to best promote learning. The active involvement of pupils, meaningfulness, joy of learning and school cultures that promote enriching interaction between pupils and teachers are at the core of the new curriculum.

EVERY PUPIL IS UNIQUE AND HAS THE RIGHT TO HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION

The fundamental value is that every pupil is unique and has the right to high-quality education. Pupils are heard, valued and encouraged. They feel that their learning and well-being matter. Pupils are guided towards a sustainable way of life and understanding the

Schools offer opportunities for individual and shared learning.

importance of sustainable development. The knowledge and skills as well as values, attitudes and will that promote these run throughout the whole curriculum.

The school culture makes these values concrete. It is developed through common principles that are defined in the core curriculum. The aim is a school that functions as a learning community that

- takes care of the safety and wellbeing of each and every member of the community
- systematically promotes versatile working approaches as well as cooperation and interaction
- is aware of different languages and sees culture as a richness

- promotes participation and democracy
- promotes equity and equality
- takes responsibility for the environment and focuses on a sustainable future

The school community interacts in a respectful and constructive manner. It offers opportunities for individual and shared learning for all its members. All members take each other into account through a dialogic interaction, striving to adapt their own actions to the activities of the community. This dialogue requires that everyone participates, listens to and hears the thoughts and needs of the others. Even if learning takes place more and more outside the school, the versatile and safe learning environment offered by the school provide a strong support for the growth of the pupil.

INTEGRATION AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN SUBJECTS

The central aims of the new curriculum, are to develop the school culture and to promote instruction with an integrative approach. The aim is that pupils will

- understand the relationship and interdependencies between different learning contents
- be able to combine the knowledge and skills provided by different subjects to form meaningful wholes
- be able to adopt and use these in collaborative learning

The core curriculum describes seven transversal competence areas. These epitomise the aims of education and reflect the competences needed in all spheres of life. Competence is constructed of knowledge, skills, values and will. The transversal competences are

- thinking and learning-to-learn
- cultural competence, interaction and expression

- taking care of oneself, managing daily life
- multiliteracy
- ICT competence
- working life competence and entrepreneurship
- participation, involvement and building a sustainable future

Multidisciplinary learning modules are tools for integrating learning and for increasing the dialogue between different subjects. For the first time it is compulsory for the schools to organise one such module at least once every school year. The core curriculum obliges the schools to plan and implement

these in cooperation between different subjects and involving pupils in their planning. Apart from these obligations, the municipalities and schools have the freedom to plan the modules according to local needs and interests.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING

Pupil assessment plays an important role in promoting the learning of the pupils. Assessment supports learning and is an essential part of the learning process.

To support teachers in the assessment, the core curriculum provides the criteria for *good performance* for assessment at the end of grade six and the final assessment in grade nine. The foremost task of assessment is to guide and encourage the pupil. Pupils are not compared to each other. Instead, pupils are guided to reflect on their own learning against the objectives. The teachers help the pupils understand the objectives and recognise their own strengths and development needs. The teachers provide opportunities for the pupils to develop their skills for self-assessment and peer assessment so that they can both give and receive constructive feedback. Assessment supports the pupils as life-long learners.

Multidisciplinary modules increase dialogue between subjects.