

Finnish Education System

Can We Still Learn Something from the North?



Esa Kukkasniemi

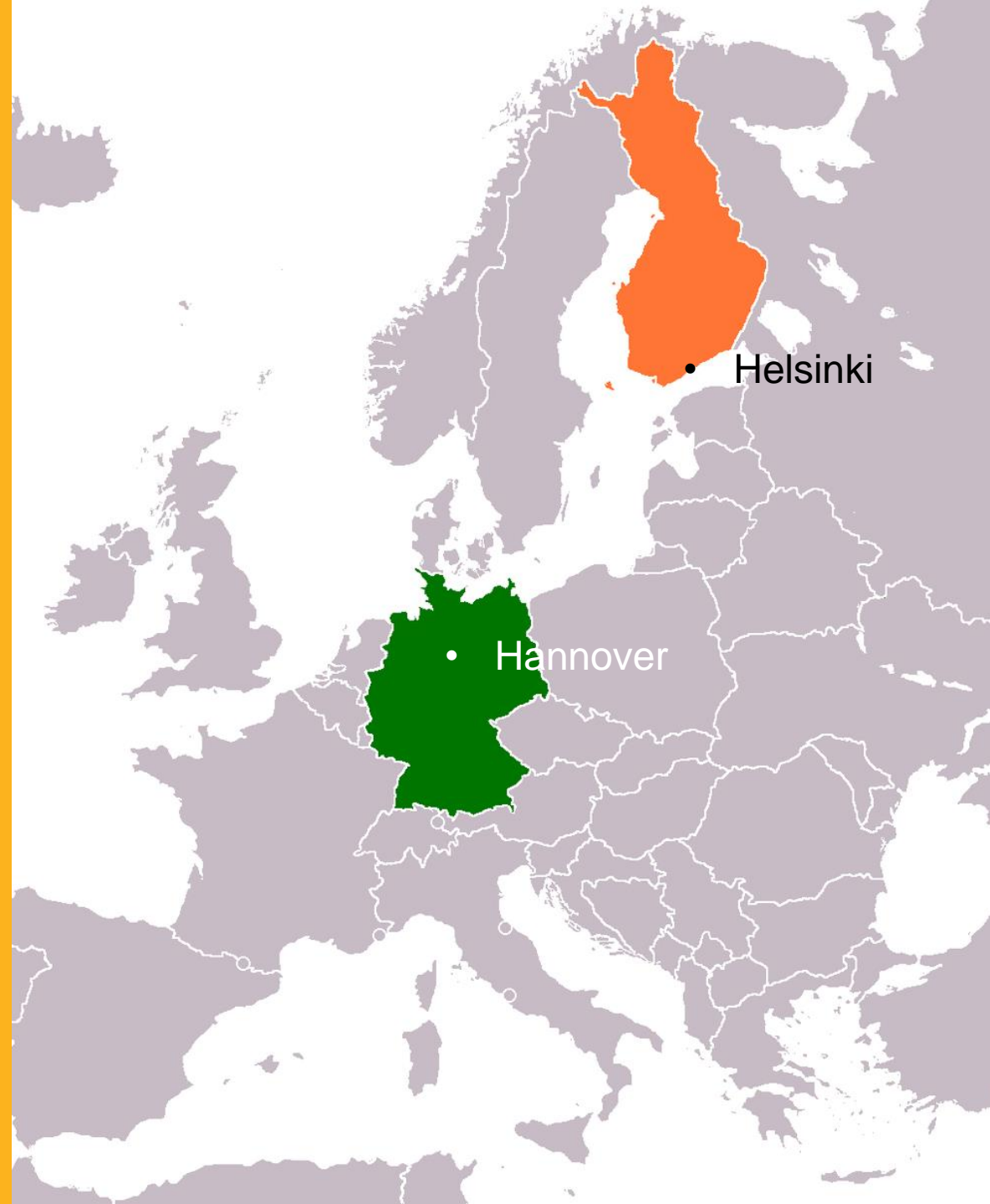
- principal of Vuorenmäki School
- working as a principal for 18 years
- supervisor for approx. 25 people
- work experience includes
 - working as an elementary school teacher
 - working as a principal
 - working as a radio personality



Finland in a nutshell



- Capital: Helsinki
- Population: 5,6 million (*18,3 inhabitants per km²*)
- Area: 338,462 km² (*Germany 357,022 km²*)
- Length from North to South: 1157 km
- Independent since Dec. 6th, 1917 (*106 years*)
- Form of government: Republic, parliamentary democracy
 - *President Sauli Niinistö*
 - *Prime Minister Petteri Orpo*



Happiest country in the world

SIX consecutive times in a row since 2018

- *World Happiness Report*

Fun facts of Finland

Highest consumption of milk in the world

Highest consumption of coffee in the world

Most heavy metal bands per capita

Very many weird sports like

- Throwing of a rubber boot

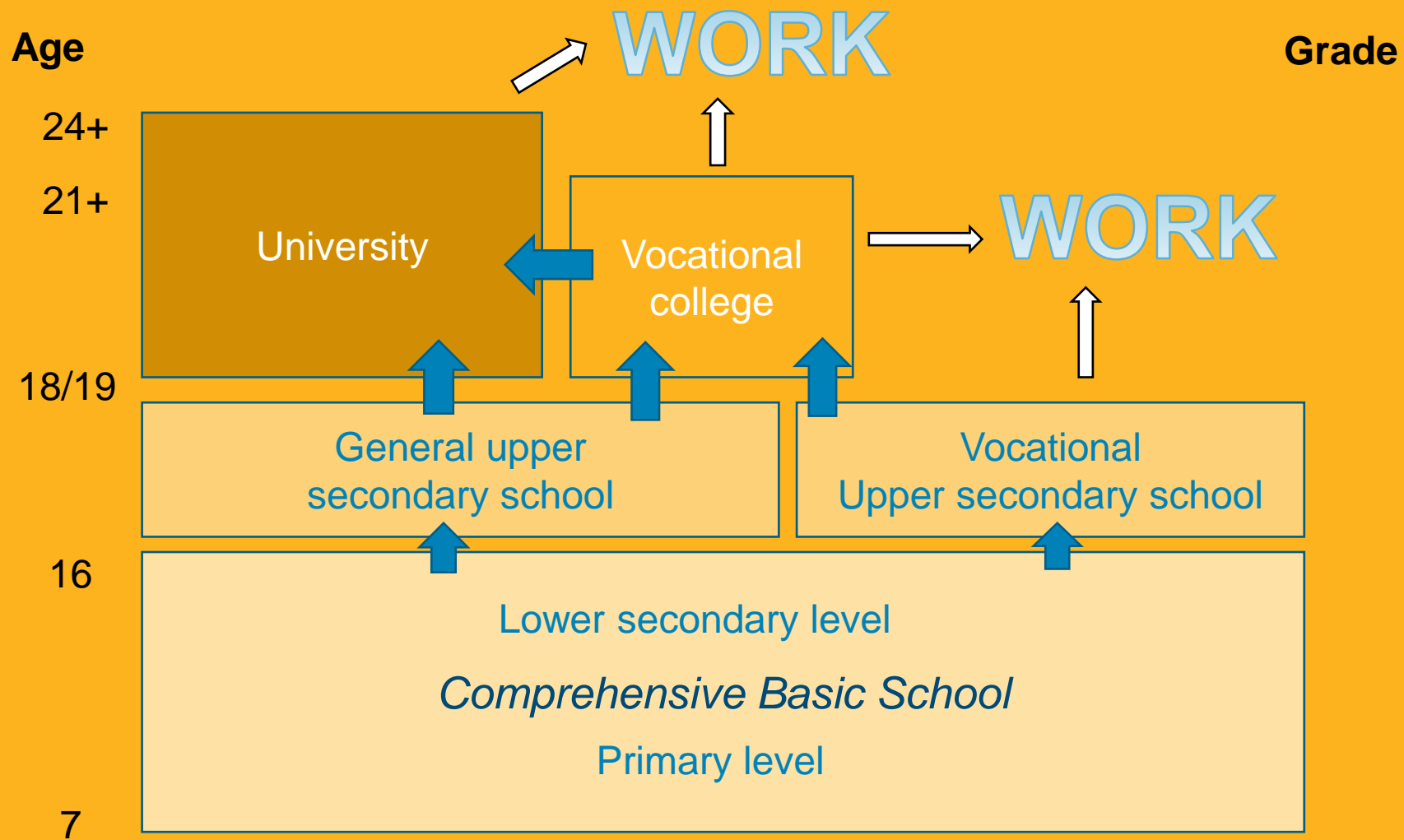
- Wife carrying championships



What's Hot About the Education System in Finland?

...and What's Not?





The Education System in Finland Since 2020

The Age of Compulsory Education was Risen in 2020

The government of Finland rose the age limit of compulsory education from 16 to 18 in 2020

This was one of the key ideas of the government of former PM Sanna Marin

Minister of Education was Ms. Li Andersson



Finnish Education Policy Key Factors

- Pre-primary education, comprehensive education and upper secondary education is free of charge and also higher education is for the most part free of charge.
- The goal is for everyone to have an equal opportunity to receive high quality education regardless of the family's income and to grow up to be active citizens.

The Government Programme / PM Petteri Orpo

- The support for learning will be renewed
- More money to support learning
- The number of lessons of basic education is increasing
- Changes in evaluation criteria
- Reducing group sizes
- Emphasis on language learning
- The goal is to reduce "disturbing activity".
- Uniform criteria for organizing basic education
- etc.

Finnish Teacher Education

How To Become a Master of Education?



Finnish Teacher Education

- For more than fifty years Finnish teachers have studied their Masters degree in universities
- You have to do a Masters degree in Education and to conduct a research project to be a teacher in the elementary school
- To work at the secondary level you have to do your Masters degree in the subject/s that you teach at school and you have to integrate the research project to your own subject



Finnish Teacher Education

- The current state of Finnish teacher education is characterized by high quality and high selectivity.
- Finnish teacher education programs are among the most popular and competitive in the country, attracting motivated and talented students.



Core Curriculum

What's New?



Comprehensive School Core Curriculum 2014

Motivation and the joy of learning

Knowledge and skills needed in life

Multidisciplinary learning modules

Support for learning

New learning environments

Assessment

Transversal competences



Transversal Competences in the Core Curriculum / Comprehensive School

- Based on the co-operation between Finland and Australia
- The project was called ATCS 21st Century Skills
- 7 different skills and knowledge



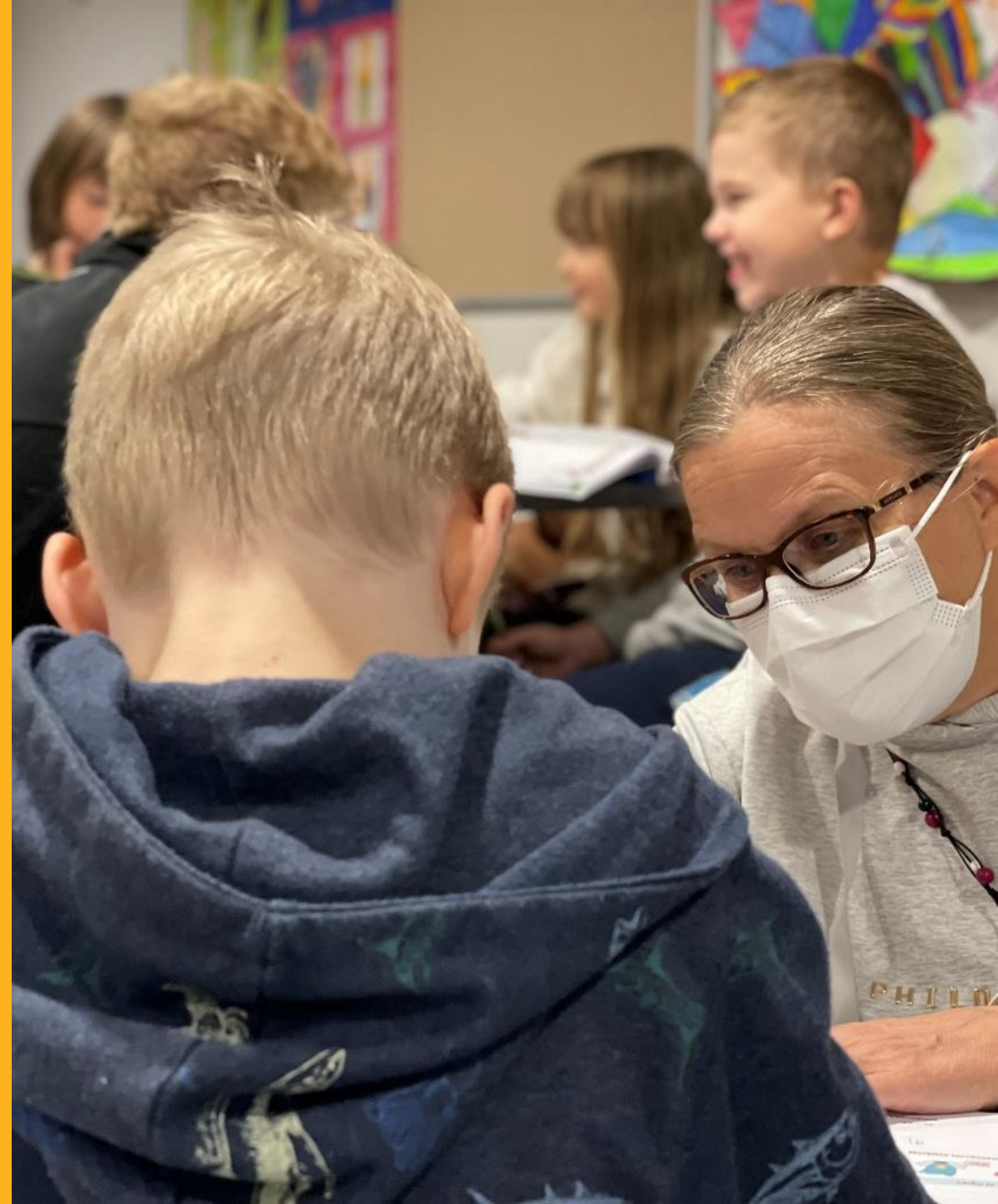
The discussion about the learning environments

- After the Core Curriculum 2014 the building of new schools was based more and more around open spaces / learning environments.
- Most of the teachers are not comfortable with the new environments and many schools are now building new walls.
- Is the problem really about the wrong environment or wrong use of the new environments?



Support for learning

- According to the law and core curriculum the emphasis should be towards inclusion.
- The idea of inclusion is many times understood wrong.
- Inclusion is sometimes used as a way of saving money.
- The discussion is extremely polarized at the moment.



What does inclusion mean?

- Inclusion at school means ensuring that every student, regardless of their background, ability, or identity, has equal access to quality education and learning opportunities.
- Inclusion at school also means respecting and valuing the diversity of students and creating a sense of belonging and community for everyone.
- Inclusion at school can benefit both students and teachers, as it can foster social and emotional skills, academic achievement, and personal growth.
- However, inclusion at school is not always easy to achieve, as it requires changes in policies, practices, and attitudes at different levels.
- Some of the challenges that inclusion at school may face include *lack of resources, training, and support for teachers and schools; resistance from parents, students, or staff; and negative stereotypes and prejudices about certain groups of students*
- ***Therefore, inclusion at school is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather a process that needs to be adapted to the specific context and needs of each school and student.***

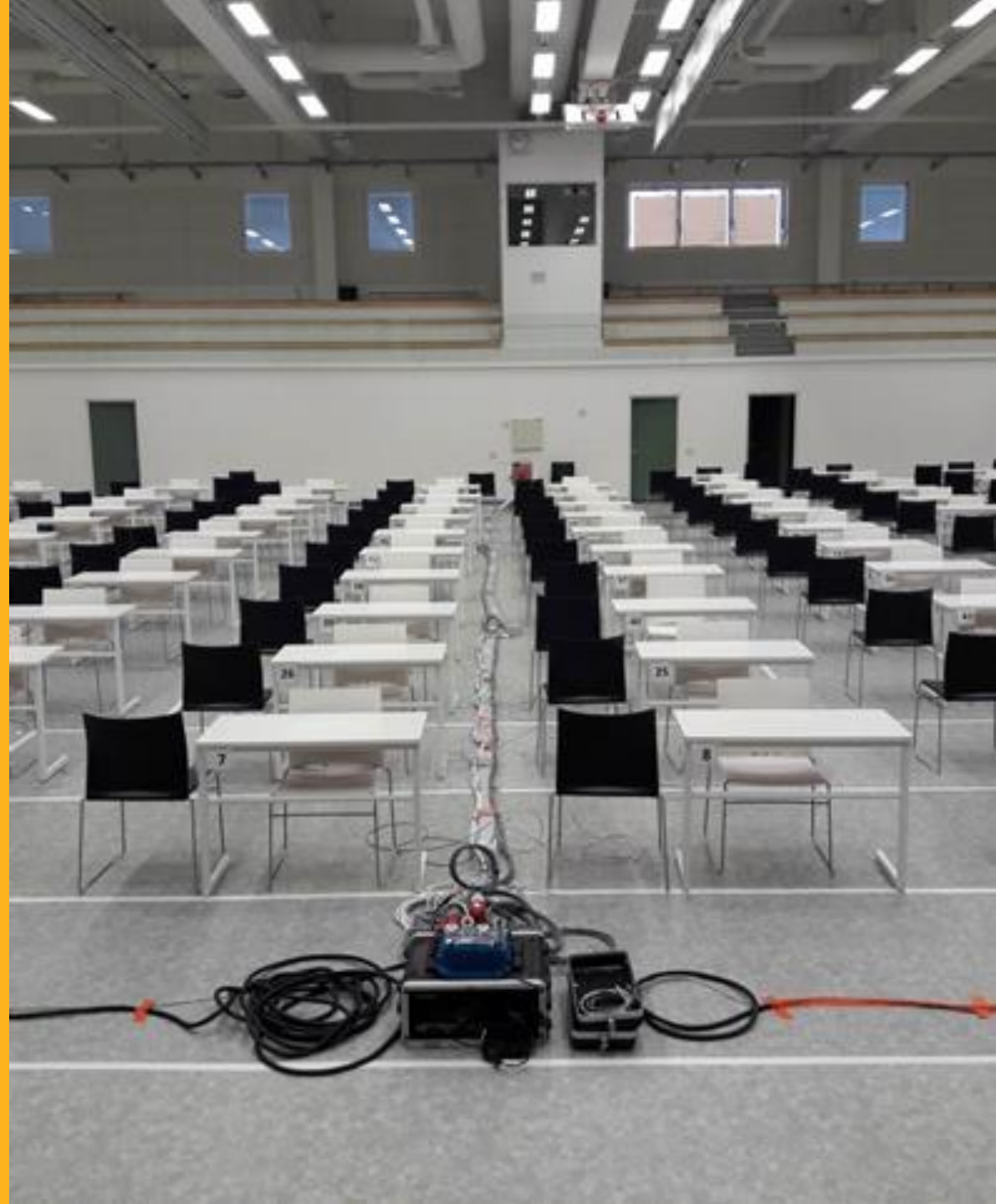
Upper Secondary School Core Curriculum 2019

- Student welfare and support for learning
- Student participation, co-operation and feedback in the planning, implementation and evaluation of education
- Global citizenship
- Multidisciplinary learning modules
- Transversal competences
- Sustainable development
- The curriculum updates the **objectives and contents** of the subjects and subject groups, as well as the **assessment criteria** and **matriculation examination**.



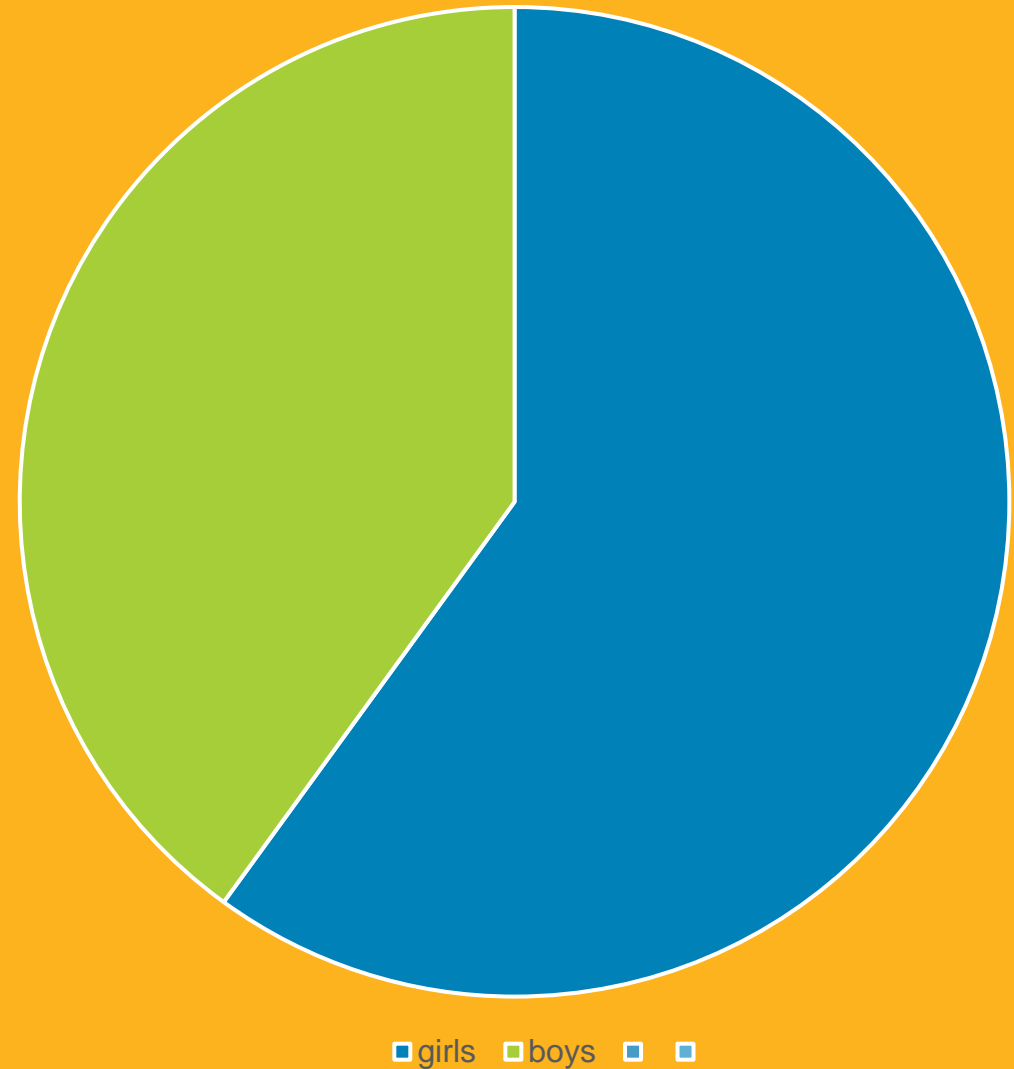
The new meaning of the matriculation examination

- Matriculation examination is a national exam for all the upper secondary students in Finland.
- It is the only real standardized test in Finland.
- The matriculation examination is used by institutions of higher education for student admissions.
- All the different subjects gain different kind of scores. Mathematics gaining the most.



Boys vs. Girls in the Upper Secondary School

- One of the biggest gaps between genders in the world.
- The consequences may be unexpected.



Programme for International Student Assessment

What Happened to Our PISA Results?



Finland's Proficiency Trend Across PISA Cycles 2000-2022

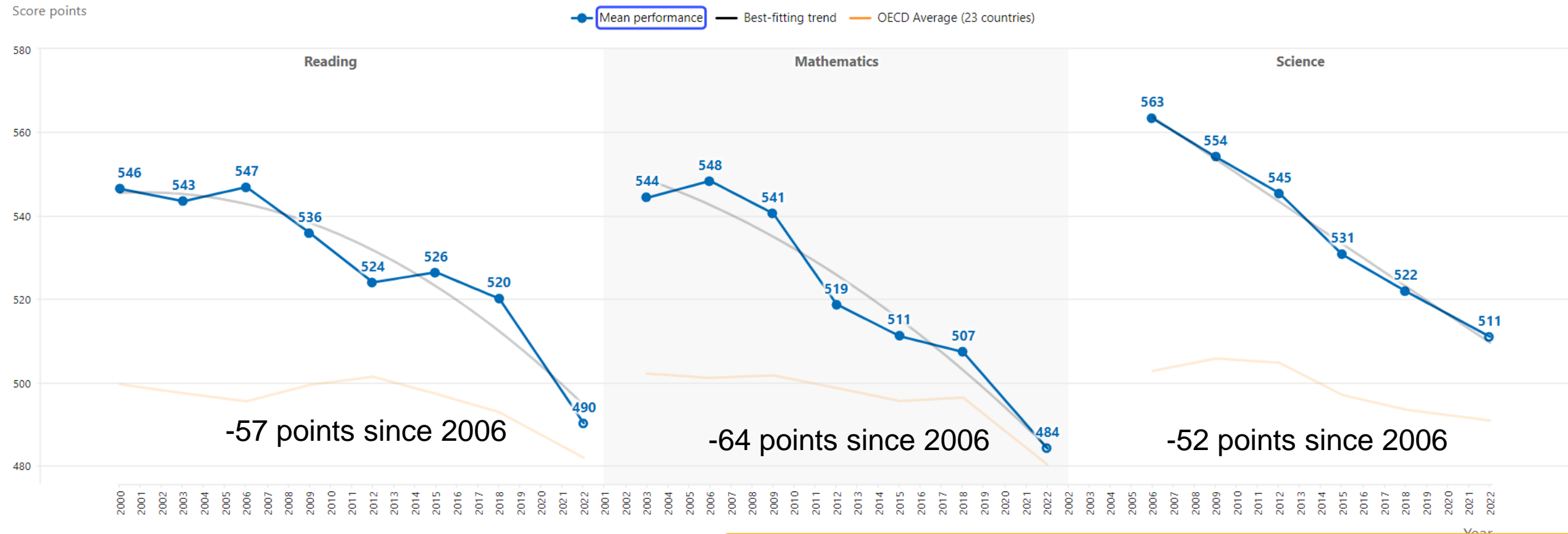


Image Source: PISA

Germany's Proficiency Trend Across PISA Cycles 2000-2022

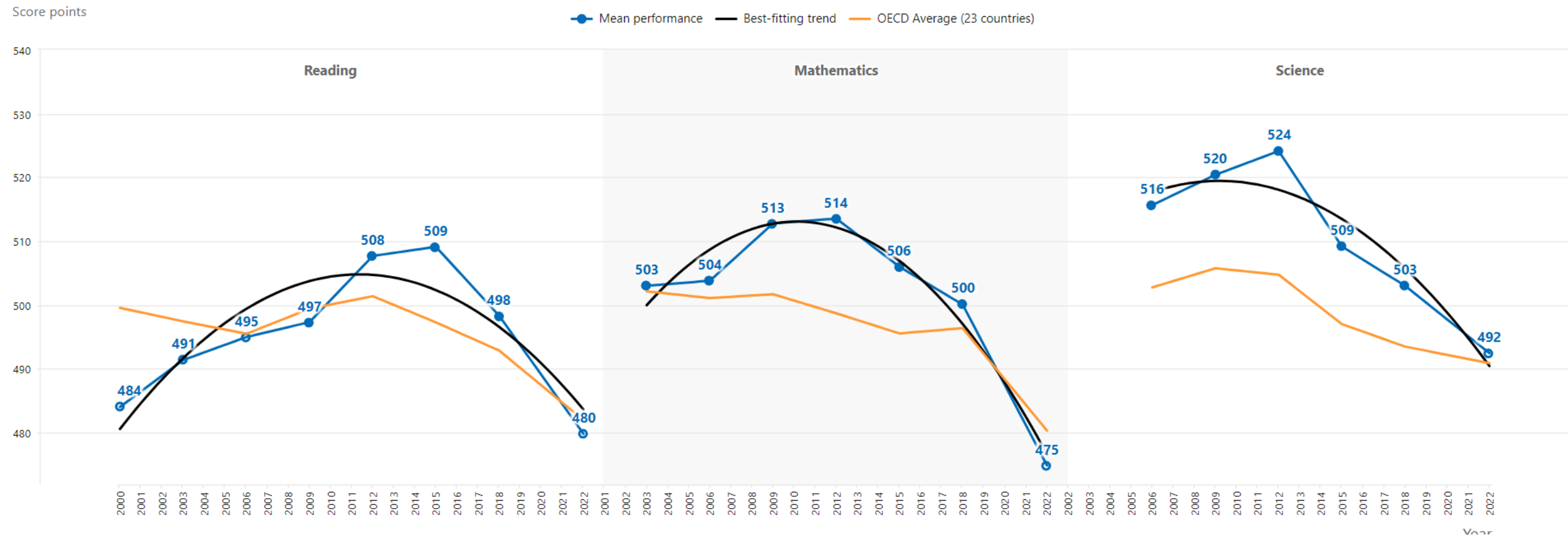


Image source: PISA

10 Countries with Highest PISA Scores in 2022:

- 1. Singapore - 560
- 2. Macau - 535
- 3. Taiwan - 533
- 4. Japan - 533
- 5. South Korea - 523
- 6. Hong Kong - 520
- 7. Estonia - 516
- 8. Canada - 506
- 9. Ireland - 504
- 10. Switzerland - 498



Finland

[See Less](#)

Metric	Value	Global Rank
Overall PISA Score 2022	495	#13
PISA Math Score 2022	484	#20
PISA Science Score 2022	511	#9
PISA Reading Score 2022	490	#14

Image source: datapanda.org

Finland had one of the widest gender gaps **in reading**, with girls scoring **45 points** higher than boys.



Some possible reasons for the decline in PISA results:

1. The increase in social problems that may affect learning outcomes, such as mental health issues, unemployment and alienation.
2. The lack of sufficient support for students with learning difficulties and with immigrant students, who lag behind their Finnish peers.
3. The changes in the curriculum, assessment and teaching methods that may have caused confusion and uncertainty among teachers and students.
4. The reduced time spent on reading and homework and the increased use of digital devices and social media, which may have affected motivation and concentration of the students.

Still High in PISA and High in Happiness

- Finland is the only country in the world that is doing this good both in PISA and the UN World Happiness Report.



What Does the PISA test Measure?

- PISA measures students' ability to use their skills to meet real-life challenges and to apply their learning in creative and innovative ways.



What Other Challenges Do We Meet In Finnish Schools in 2023?

And What Are the Solutions Provided?



Some Selected Challenges at the Moment in Finnish Education?

- Younger and younger pupils are reporting stress symptoms
- Wellbeing deficit issues
- Motivational issues
- School absences
- How to keep the boys learning? (PISA)



School Health Issue Study 2023

ELEMENTARY LEVEL (grades 4 and 5)

- 30 per cent of the pupils in grades 4 and 5 do not eat breakfast every school morning.
- 16 per cent of the pupils in grades 4 and 5 report school exhaustion
- Only 52 per cent of the pupils in grades 4 and 5 dare to say their own opinion during the lessons.
- 27 per cent of the pupils in grades 4 and 5 experience at least mild anxiety symptoms.

SECONDARY LEVEL (grades 8 and 9)

- More than one third of the girls and one in five boys consider their health as average or poor.
- 37 per cent of boys and 47 per cent of girls in grades 8 and 9 of basic education reported that they do not eat breakfast every school day morning.

Schools on the Move

- More than 90 per cent of Finnish schools participate in the programme.
- By adding physical activity to the school day, it is possible to improve not only the health and wellbeing of pupils but also the learning outcomes and school enjoyment and create a peaceful working atmosphere.
- The Finnish Schools on the Move concept is composed of three areas:
 1. Creating an active culture
 2. Developing the pedagogy
 3. Increasing movement



SCHOOLS ON THE MOVE



What Can We Learn About Motivation from the Entrepreneurs?

- Pikkuyrittäjät is an entrepreneurship program for elementary schools where pupils come up with a business idea in a group and develop it further with assistance of the teacher.
- Program is part of curricula and free of charge.
- At the end of the program, pupils will have their grand finale -event, where they sell the products and services they have come up with.



School absences

- After COVID-19 the school absences exploded in Finland.
- We are talking about 100 000 to 200 000 students who have problems in attending school or don't go to school at all.
- The reasons are many:
 - Anxiety symptoms
 - Depression symptoms
 - Problems with parents or inside the family
 - Problems with friends and peers
 - Etc.



Koulu kunnossa -project

- The goal of the KouluKunnossa -project is to engage more and more students in going to school and to create more meaningful everyday and learning environments for everyone.
- The model has different interventions depending on the level of absence after 30/50/70 and 90 hours of absence
- The idea is to cut the absences as early as possible.



KOULUKUNNOSSA
SKOLSKICK

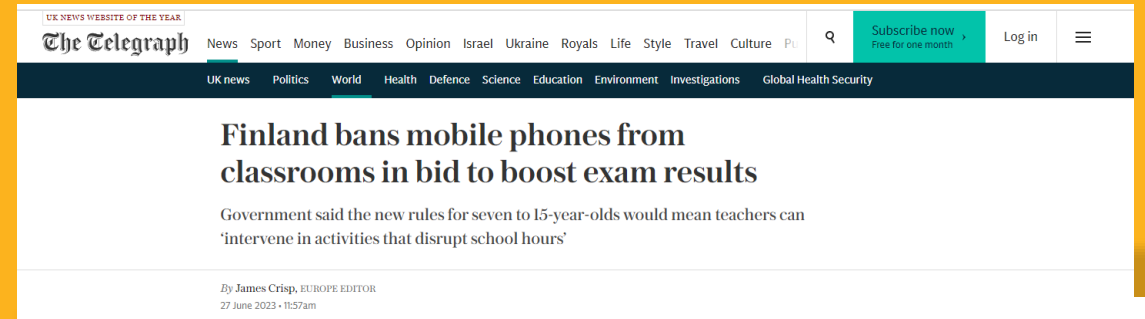
What is the role of mobile devices?

- At the moment the use of mobile devices depends on the pedagogical approach, the school policy, and the individual preferences of teachers and students.
- At the moment the law says a teacher can ban the use of mobile devices when it's “distracting teaching or learning”.
- The discussion at the moment is very much polarized.



The Government of Finland to ban the use of mobile devices at school?

- *“The government will reinforce the powers of teachers and principals to intervene in activities that disrupt teaching during school hours.”*
- *“We will make the necessary legislative amendments to enable more efficient restrictions in cases such as the use of mobile devices during the school day so that pupils and students can better concentrate on teaching.”*



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