

## **Finland**

HENNA VIRKKUNEN, *Minister of Education*: I think one of the most important political issues in Finland is that we want to have a system where all the pupils and all the people have the equal opportunities and education, and it doesn't matter where you are living or are you rich or poor, or are you girl or boy. We want to give equal opportunities for everyone.

TITLE: Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Finland

TIMO LANKINEN, *Director General, National Board of Education, Finland*: Finland restructurized totally basic education in 1970s. It was a very centralistic reform. During 1980s, we began to decentralize powers to municipalities. Especially during 1990s, we decentralized a lot of decision-making powers to education providers. And even, of course, on our schools and teachers, a lot. And that's of course because we have highly-trailed teachers, and we can actually give them many, many tasks.

TEXT SLIDE: Finland has consistently been one of the top-performers of all countries participating in PISA from 2000 to 2009.

TEACHER: *Now I'm going to read a story about some ducks and a fox. We have two ducks and a fox here. Now please listen, please concentrate and listen.*

HENNA VIRKKUNEN: In Finland, if we are living our educational system, the basic education, it's very decentralized. So, the municipalities, they are running the schools and they have the responsible of the schools. But of course, we have the basic education legislation. It's in national level. And then we have also a national core curricula. But the schools and municipalities- they have also utmost freedom themselves.

TEXT SLIDE: Finland's decentralization of education in the 1990s required a strong, highly trained teaching force.

TEACHER: *Ok, who has read Naomi Klein's book "No Logo"?*

STUDENT: *It's a bit difficult to say in Swedish.*

TEACHER: *It's okay, just explain it.*

STUDENT: *It means that people like the brand, or the trademark more than the product itself. It's more important, the logo.*

PASI SAHLBERG, *Director General, Cimo, Finland*: Teaching profession in Finland has always been popular. And this is what I hear in many other countries, that teaching used to be very popular profession among young people. I think the good question is that how Finland has been able to maintain teaching in the school as

something that attracts young people. And I think that what distinguishes our schools from the many other schools is that we have been able to keep teaching professional firstly intellectually attractive and interesting for teachers- in other words, that our teachers, they feel that they can use the knowledge and skills that they learn in teacher education fully- that they have a role in curriculum planning and design; they have a very important role in assessing students' performance.

TIMO LANKINEN: Teacher, as a profession, is very appreciated in Finland. But it's interesting that it has maintained its appeal, also, to young Finns. It's one of the professions, actually, what comes after doctors and lawyers- a very appealing one to young Finns.

HENNA VIRKKUNEN: I think one of the main reasons behind the good learning outcomes and results is the good teacher education. All the teachers, they have Master's degree from the university in Finland, and because the teachers' profession is very highly appreciated in Fin society, so it means that all the universities, they can select the best students to become a teacher. So, of course, it's helped because they can get the most motivated and best people to become a teacher.

TEACHER: *Well, if there were 41 people in the club last year, and there are 7 fewer people this year, how many people are in the club?*

STUDENT: *Is this right?*

TEACHER: *So 41 minus 7? Yes, that's right.*

OLLI LUUKKAINEN, *President, Trade Union of Education in Finland*: Our idea is that every teacher must be educated in universities. All teachers are Master degree. It is very important. And by this way, we hope that we can connect very well theory and practice. Our specialty is also teacher training schools, where students which are in teacher education can practice those things which they have studied in theory in university.

JANNIKA SARIMO, *English Teacher, Turun Normaalikoulu*: So, the teacher trainees need to have a certain amount of years of their subject learned at the university before they can enter the Teacher Training program. Teacher training for subject teachers lasts for a year, and so initially they start with theory; they are at the university for some weeks. Then they come to us for a period of orientation where they meet their mentor teachers and they get to see the classrooms. And then there's a period during which they teach in pairs. After that, they go back to the university to get some more theory. They also have now some experience; they're able to maybe ask different questions because they have some experience from the practical side of things. And so, it's kind of a wave back and forth between coming to get the practical side at the school, and then going back to gain some more information regarding theory.

TEACHER: *Girls, have you read the poem? Now you can read it again and while you do it, try to figure out what makes it a poem.*

ERNO LEHTINEN, *Academy Professor, University of Turku*: Research is integrated in development of teaching and practices. We have invested quite a lot of money in educational research, or research of educational psychology, special education, policy of education, so that when you compare the amount of research that's in this field with other countries, I think that we have invested a lot. And this means that we have quite a large research space for developing educational policy, for developing teaching learning environments, to developing educational materials, and so on. And because we have research, we also can very deeply follow what is happening in the world.

SUVI LEHTOMAKI, *Student Teacher, Turun Normaalikoulu*: *Yesterday, as you may remember, we saw this exercise. Look at the figures on the board, can someone help me to add the numbers in each column? What figure should we have in the yellow box?*

STUDENT: 2

SUVI LEHTOMAKI: *The number 2, excellent. Can you write it on the board for me?*

OLLI MAATTA, *Vice Principal, Upper Secondary School; Teacher of Swedish and English, Helsinki Normal Lyceum*: Becoming teachers are seeing how we subject teachers work in their in-service training. On a classroom setting, we also want to provide them with the tools and information how to then be able to tackle the same kind of problems after they have finished their teacher training and enter their first workplace. And we've designed together with colleagues a mentoring program.

SUVI LEHTOMAKI: *And then number seven goes underneath which box? In the boxes where you have number ones. Right. And then under that we write 43, right?*

PASI SAHLBERG: If we take a look at how the practical training in teacher training schools or part of the teacher training here works, there's an important element that we call "mentoring" –or "supervision," actually. So, the normal cycle is, you have a meeting with a senior teacher first. You go through your plan. You have to explain what do you want to do. Then you run the class, your lesson, and this teacher is observing this. And then afterwards you have this mentoring type of meeting where you go through the different ideas of what you saw in a class.

MENTOR: *You had said that you had problems with the board before, those are technical matters, and we will look into it but I think you managed well. You noticed how difficult it was, you had to move from the board and then come back to the computer, but that's a technical detail and we'll get some new equipment. It will be OK in the future.*

SUVI LEHTOMAKI: I think this feedback system is really good. It's really important to get a lot of feedback. By doing so, I'm able to adjust the tasks for the pupils. And the mentor helps me to pay attention to things that I would otherwise miss. And I also pay attention to the level of difficulty of the tasks and how each child manages them.

TEACHER: *We can say here that seven divided by three is two and the remaining part here, one.*

PASI SAHLBERG: The other thing is that I think we are putting a lot of emphasis on the early detection of any difficulties and problems that the students in our schools may have, and this is a very different policy to many other countries, where the other countries, other systems, may have measures to step in when the problems are. But in most other places that I know, these measures are designed in a way that they are implemented only when the problems have emerged, and are too visible. But we don't think like this in Finland. I think we believe in this early intervention and really try to invest in the up-front part of the education process, to make sure that those who are likely to be in trouble will be recognized early and provided help and support as quickly as possible.

TEXT SLIDE: Early intervention: In Finland, there is an emphasis placed on early intervention. The percentage of students benefitting from part-time and full-time special interventions is highest from grades 1-3. (Statistics Finland, 2010)

TIMO LANKINEN: Individual support is very, very important in Finnish schools and Finnish education system overall. We provide for many pupils and students, every level actually, extra help if they are falling behind.

TEXT SLIDE: Classroom time for teachers of lower secondary education:

- 703 hours per year, average for OECD countries
- 592 hours per year, average for Finland

Finnish teachers concentrate much of their extra time on supporting students who need special attention.

HENNA VIRKKUNEN: Nearly 30 percent of the pupils, they are having some kind of special support- part-time special support normally, and in the regular education- in normal classrooms. It's often that the teacher is having, for example, assistant who is helping the teacher during the lesson and helping those pupils who need more help.

TEACHER: *And now we are going to read through all the words which we know already.*

OLLI MAATTA: What happens many times is that the special teacher is available for a couple of hours, and then she picks the student to a separate classroom and helps him or her there. And we also make an individual learning plan for that individual

student. And by taking these measures, we try to guarantee that no one is lagging behind.

PASI SAHLBERG: I think the other thing that is significant in the Finnish case, in this respect, is that we have much higher rates of those who are recognized, or labeled, if you wish, special needs pupils. If you look at the 15-year-olds or 16-year-old Finns who are leading this basic school, most of them have been in one or other type of special education throughout their schooling, which means that special education actually is nothing special, so it's that you are a special child or student if you haven't been... if you haven't ever used special services. So, I think with this we have been able to positively affect both the equity of the system and also the quality of the system that we can see now in this international studies.

TEXT SLIDE: Special education: It is estimated that between 40-45% of students in Finnish schools have had some type of special intervention by the time they finish comprehensive school. (Source: Sahlberg, 2011)

TEACHER (Student Welfare Team): *Well she has difficulty concentrating in a bigger group. And even in a smaller group she has difficulties concentrating on her work.*

TEACHER 2: *Has she had these problems before?*

TEACHER 3: *No, I don't think so, and that's why I'm very worried, because I can see that she is very talented. For instance in her English class, she's working very hard, she's writing stories.*

OLLI MAATTA: The Student Welfare Team gathers on a weekly basis and there are many professionals taking part in that team. Subject teachers are the ones who inform the group with different cases. There might be bullying, they might be skipping classes, there might be learning difficulties, there might be behavioral problems- all kinds of things. And the subject teacher is the first one to inform, for example, the school nurse, the school psychologist, student counselor, the principal, about these problems. And then these individual problems are dealt with, case by case, in this weekly meeting that every school in Finland has.

TEACHER 4: *It seems like she has a problem with her looks. She feels that she is too big. I was trying to tell her that she is not too big, I wanted her to understand that.*

MERJA LAINE, *Student Counselor, Helsinki Normal Lyceum*: The Student Welfare Group deals with any kinds of problems that we see in school having to do with problems at home or at learning disabilities, multicultural problems. The main value of our Student Welfare group is to interrupt as soon as possible, problems involved.

TIMO LANKINEN: We have very small disparities between low achievers and high achievers in PISA tests, and one reason behind our success- there is a virtuous circle surrounding teaching. And that has to do with excellent teacher education and

training. Other reason could be that we have always emphasized high standards for all.

HENNA VIRKKUNEN: One of the best parts of our educational system is that the differences between the schools- they are very small in Finland, so we have good quality in all the schools. And always, the parents- they can trust that the school which is nearest their home, that it has very good quality. And of course, this is one of the issues that we have to make sure that it's going to be like that also in the future. We have to work every day for that, that we can keep the good quality and equal opportunities for everyone all over the country.