

# WELCOME TO SCHOOL IN ROVANIEMI

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND PUPILS ABOUT SCHOOL ATTENDANCE



## FOR THE READER

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This guide has been prepared with support from the Multicultural Skills Development Project of the Finnish National Board of Education for parents who have moved to Finland from abroad. Its purpose is to serve as an aid in co-operation between the home and school. The goal is to provide basic information on the Finnish comprehensive school system and the studying possibilities in the City of Rovaniemi. The guide is available in English, Russian, Burmese, Arabic and Somali.

We look forward to seeing you at school in Rovaniemi!

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# 1 COMPULSORY EDUCATION

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All children living in Finland are bound by compulsory education. Compulsory education means completing comprehensive school. Compulsory education begins the year that the child turns seven. Compulsory education ends when the syllabus of basic education has been completed or in July of the year when the child turns seventeen. It is the parents' duty to make sure that their child attends school regularly.

# 2 ENROLMENT IN SCHOOL

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Recently immigrated children at basic-education age (7–16-year-olds) in need of a school place must be enrolled by the School Planner of the School Service Centre of the City of Rovaniemi (0400 716 285) or the Co-ordinator of Immigrant Education (0400 950 162)

using a form available on the city's website, by phone or in person. Usually school attendance begins with period of instruction about one year long, preparing the child for basic education until his/her Finnish language skills are sufficient to follow education in basic education. In the spring, children of six years of age living permanently in Rovaniemi receive the so-called "school letter" indicating the child's future school and the enrolment date.

# 3 BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOL

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## Learning the way to school

Before school start, parents must learn with their child a safe way to school. If the way to school of a pupil in basic education is over three kilometres in the first and second grade or over five kilometres in grades 3–9, he/she is entitled to school transport free of charge. In the autumn and winter, mornings and afternoons are dark. When it is dark outside, it is very important for the child to have a reflector attached to his/her clothing.





Usually younger children are not allowed to ride their bikes to school.

### **School rules**

At the start of school, the children learn the school and class rules, and familiarise themselves with the school environment and recess areas. All schools have rules. If a pupil fails to abide by those rules, his/her parents will be notified with a letter or over the phone. If the family has a computer at home, contact can be made electronically. Pupils receive a school bulletin in the autumn when the school starts. This bulletin provides information about the school, personnel and schedules of the school year.

### **Timetable**

In school, every class has its own timetable. The timetable indicates the time when school days begin and end. Usually subjects are also marked on the timetable. The timetable should be kept in sight at home.

### **Meal**

At school, pupils are given a hot meal everyday free-of-charge. It is important for the pupil to eat at school. Eating the school meal gives energy for the rest of the day. Religious beliefs and allergies are taken into consideration in school meals. If the pupil cannot eat something, the parents must notify the school.

### **Clothing**

At school, pupils are outside every day during breaks. The pupil must wear clothes that allow him/her to go outside. Pupils go outside even if it rains or the temperature falls below zero. In winter time, a winter coat, warm trousers and long underwear, winter boots, woollen hat and warm gloves are needed.



In the spring and autumn, a coat, gloves and woollen hat, and at times also rubber boots, are needed.

### **Physical education**

Pupils have physical education at least once a week. Physical education is a compulsory subject that is evaluated just like any other subject. Practised sports vary according to seasons. All sports, both outside and inside, require appropriate equipment.

### **Doing homework**

Pupils are given homework every day. It is recommended for the child to do all homework on the same day that he/she is given it. At home, parents must check that all homework has been done. The child needs a peaceful place at home where he/she can concentrate on doing the homework.

### **Hobbies and playing**

Hobbies and playing are important. Children play games during breaks. There must also be time for outdoor activities, playing, hobbies and friends after the school day. Various clubs are organised at schools for pupils in the afternoons and evenings.

### **Safe afternoon**

When the school day is over, the child must have a safe place to go after school. It is usually not allowed to remain in the school area after school. If there is not an adult at home after school, a young pupil can attend an afternoon club. Afternoon clubs are intended for pupils of the first and second grades whose parents are not at home in the afternoons. Club activities include outdoor activities, playing, singing, physical exercise, hobby crafts, excursions and a lot of other fun stuff. A snack is offered at the club. Afternoon clubs are subject to a fee.



## School year, holidays and absences

The school year is divided into autumn term and spring term. The autumn term begins in August and ends in December. The spring term begins in January and ends on the last weekday of week 22. Then begins the summer holiday which ends in August. The school year also has other holidays, such as the autumn and winter holidays.

If a pupil is sick, his/her parents must immediately notify the class teacher or tutor. Sick children must stay at home. A sick child can infect others. It is recommended to stay at home for one day without fever/symptoms before returning to school.

If a pupil needs to be away from school, permission must be requested well in advance. The teacher can grant an absence of 1 to 5 days. The principal decides on longer absences. It is the parents' duty to ensure during these absences that their child does all the assigned homework. Holiday trips should be arranged to coincide with school holidays.

## Evaluation

The pupil receives a term report at the end of the autumn term and a school-year report at the end of the school year. There may also be

periodical evaluations and evaluation discussions with the pupil, guardian and teacher. In elementary instruction, evaluations are verbal. Starting in the third grade, the pupil will be evaluated numerically. Verbal evaluations can be given to a pupil of an immigrant background during the entire period of basic education, excluding the leaving certificate in the ninth grade. This makes it easier for the pupil to progress in school according to his/her own language-learning goals.



# 4 WHAT IS NEEDED AT SCHOOL?

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## School supplies

Every day, a pupil needs his/her textbooks, school supplies and exercise equipment.

Textbooks and notebooks are provided by the school. The pupil needs a rucksack or bag for carrying books. The pupil also needs a pencil case, an eraser, a sharpener and a ruler. Textbooks are not for the pupil to keep. If a textbook gets torn or is lost, the parent or guardian must pay for it. Excellent care must be taken of school supplies.

## Exercise equipment

The child needs exercise clothes for physical education. For example, loose trousers and a short-sleeved shirt is a suitable outfit for an indoor class. For outdoor sports, the child must have clothing to match the season. Exercise clothes are changed in a changing room before the gym class. Pupils shower after the gym class so a towel is needed. Winter sports include cross-country skiing and skating. The child should have his/her own skis and skates. There is a swimming period once a year. For swimming class, a swimsuit or swimwear, a towel, a small towel to sit on in the sauna and soap are needed.

## Other things

School rules state whether or not money, sweets or toys, for example, are allowed in school. Schools also have rules about mobile

phones. It is absolutely forbidden to bring to school, for yourself or other pupils, anything dangerous, such as matches, sharp objects, cigarettes or intoxicants.

## 5 TASKS AT HOME

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The parent or guardian is in charge of the child's upbringing. Home and school work together to ensure the child's learning and school attendance. The parent/guardian and teacher must co-operate.

### **School attendance is successful when**

- the child has eaten breakfast at home and slept long enough (younger children 10–11 hours and older children 9–10 hours)
- the child wears clothing that is appropriate for the season and weather
- the child can dress and undress him/herself without help
- the child's hygiene is taken care of; hands are always washed before a meal and after going to the toilet
- the child can eat properly; the use of a fork and knife should be learnt at home
- all homework is done and the child has all his/her school things with him/her
- every day the parent/guardian checks the home/school communication notebook or the electronic Wilma communication system where the teacher can write important messages to parents. Parents can also write messages to the teacher in the notebook or the Wilma system.

### **Own language and culture**

It is the family's duty to support the child in maintaining his/her mother tongue and knowledge of his/her own culture. Competence in the mother tongue also makes it easier to learn Finnish. The city aims to provide na-





tive language teaching for as many language groups as possible. If such teaching is provided, the parents must see to it that their children participate in it. However, participating in native language lessons is voluntary.

## 6 SCHOOL PERSONNEL

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### **Principal**

The principal is the director of the school and is in charge of school operations. He/she plans school operations together with the teachers.

### **School secretary**

The school secretary assists the principal and school personnel in matters regarding pupil administration, evaluation, information systems and statistics. The school secretary provides information about school operations and schedules.

### **Teacher preparing children for basic education**

Most often a pupil speaking a foreign language starts school with a teacher who is in

charge of preparing him/her for basic education. The teacher maps the pupil's previous studies and plans a curriculum for every pupil individually. Co-operation with the basic education teachers and pupils begins straight away. The Finnish language is best learned in interaction with Finnish children.

### **Class teacher (grades 1–6)**

In primary school, the class teacher takes care of the pupils in his/her class and their learning during the school day. Questions regarding school attendance can be directed to the class teacher. Parents/guardians meet the class teacher at parents' evenings and parent-teacher meetings. An interpreter may accompany you.

### **Tutor (grades 7–9)**

In secondary school, every class has a tutor who answers questions regarding school attendance. The pupil reports absences to his/her tutor. Parents/guardians meet the tutor at parents' evenings and parent-teacher meetings. An interpreter may accompany you.

### **Subject teacher (grades 7–9)**

In secondary school, different subjects are taught by subject teachers. Pupils have several different teachers.

### **School attendance instructor**

Sometimes there is an instructor in the classroom who helps pupils with their studies. There is always an instructor participating in preparatory instruction in addition to a teacher.

### **Teacher of Finnish as a second language (F2)**

The teacher of Finnish as a second language teaches Finnish to pupils with different language and cultural backgrounds.

### **Guidance counsellor (secondary school)**

The guidance counsellor helps with choosing subjects and assists the pupil in preparing a plan for future studies and with drawing up his/her application for the joint application system at the end of the ninth grade.

### **Mother tongue teacher**

The mother tongue teacher teaches the pupil his/her own mother tongue and culture.

### **Teacher of the pupil's religion**

This teacher provides the pupil with instruction about his/her own religion. The classes are organised, if there are at least three pupils in the municipality who belong to the same religious group and their parents/guardians request it.

### **Special needs teacher**

Schools have special needs teachers helping pupils who need support in learning. The special needs teacher helps with reading, writing, pronunciation, history or mathematics, for example.

### **KOTA teacher**

The KOTA teacher is a remedial and F2 teacher for pupils coming from different language and cultural backgrounds. This teacher helps pupils in various subjects and with language acquisition. The KOTA teacher participates in the co-operation between home and school and he/she can be contacted in matters regarding school attendance.

### **School social worker**

The school social worker is the school welfare officer. The school social worker helps and guides pupils in various matters regarding school attendance in co-operation with parents/guardians and teachers. Parents/guardians can also call the school social worker directly if they have concerns about their child's school attendance and leisure-time activities.

### **School psychologist**

The school psychologist helps pupils who are experiencing difficulties in learning or school attendance. The school psychologist prepares evaluations based on discussions and psychological research media. The school psychologist plans together with the parents/guardians and teachers the necessary support measures enabling the pupil's school attendance in the best possible manner.

### **School nurse**

Every school has a school nurse. Pupils can see the school nurse during the school day, if they have fallen ill or hurt themselves. School nurses do regular health check-ups, monitor the development of teenagers and guide pupils and families in matters regarding wellbeing and lifestyle. Guardians are invited to participate in the health check-ups. Usually a pupil who has moved to Finland goes to a health check-up before starting school.

### **School doctor**

Appointments for the school doctor are arranged via the school nurse.

School-specific appointment times are indicated in school bulletins.

### **Kitchen and cleaning personnel**

Cleaners keep the school tidy and clean. The kitchen personnel prepare the daily meal.

### **School caretaker**

The school caretaker keeps the school building and courtyard in order. He/she also locks the doors.

## **7 HELP IN LEARNING AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**



In school-related questions parents can contact their child's own teacher or tutor who will arrange for an interpreter for a school meeting, if necessary. At some of the schools in Rovaniemi, KOTA teachers provide remedial teaching and Finnish teaching to pupils with immigration backgrounds. They work together with parents/guardians in various issues regarding school attendance. If a child needs help in learning or school attendance, the school can arrange for various support measures. In the school world, support measures can be divided into general, boosted and special support.

### **General support**

General support refers to measures that aim to support the learning of all pupils. General support comprises remedial teaching and guidance counselling, for example. Pupils with immigration backgrounds are entitled to their own special remedial teaching and Finnish teaching. Remedial teaching can be arranged during the school day or outside classes.

### **Boosted support**

In boosted support, the pupil's learning and school attendance are supported and monitored regularly and additional support forms are used. A learning plan will be prepared for the pupil with the support measures used. In addition to those mentioned above, support forms include part-time remedial teaching and regular help from the school social worker, for example.

### **Special support**

Special support is provided for pupils whose goals set for learning and school attendance are not sufficiently met with the other support measures. Special support comprises remedial teaching and all the other support forms. An Individual Educational Plan (IEP)

will be prepared for the pupil. The pupil's teaching can be arranged in a special group and individual learning goals, which are easier to reach than those on the general goal level, can be determined for the pupil. An official administrative decision will be made on providing special support. The guardians will be heard before the special support decision is made and they will participate in planning the support measures.

## 8 WHAT TO DO AFTER COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL?

Studying continues after basic education. The secondary school guidance counsellor will help young people to find a suitable study place. In Rovaniemi, options include ASKEL TRAININGS, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING as well as GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL and VOCATIONAL GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL, for example. If a pupil has failed to complete basic education, studies can also be completed at evening classes at the general upper secondary school for adults, and Finnish can be brushed up during the day at the Opin



Aika tuition programme targeted at young immigrants and asylum seekers.

**Askel training** guides and prepares for further studies and lasts from one to three years. Different groups are organised as necessary. Instruction preparing for general upper secondary school is being planned in Rovaniemi in accordance with the schedule determined by legislation.

### **Vocational education and training**

lasts approximately three years, then students are ready to enter working life or set up their own businesses. Another option is to continue their studies at an university of applied sciences or university.

### **General upper secondary school**

requires a good command of the Finnish language as well as motivation to study diligently. At general upper secondary school, the same subjects are studied as in comprehensive school. Studies last approximately three years. After completing general upper secondary school, students can apply to a vocational school, university or university of applied sciences.

**Vocational general upper secondary school** comprises both general upper secondary school studies and vocational studies. Studies last approximately four years.



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