Numerous studies have shown that arts and cultural education strengthens the cultural capital of children and young people, and supports their capacities to actively participate in society. Based on this premise, comprehensive schools should be considered as Finland’s largest cultural centers, where high-quality, diverse arts and cultural education is equally available to all.
Arts and cultural education is offered in comprehensive schools, art schools, children’s cultural centres, museums, arts institutions, and libraries. Of these, only comprehensive schools reach all children and young people. Although schools carry an important responsibility to ensure cultural and social equality and inclusion, there are not sufficient resources to implement high-quality, diverse arts and cultural education in order to secure pupils’ cultural rights.¹

The quality, diversity and accessibility of arts and cultural education can be improved by strengthening collaboration between schools and providers of arts and cultural education. Through cross-sectoral cooperation, schools will be able to ensure that equality and cultural rights are realized.

**Measures for enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration**

- **Municipal culture and education departments** should map out providers of regional arts and cultural education services and, drawing upon past experiences, explore the possibilities and challenges for collaboration with them.

- **Municipal education departments** should collect pupils’ wishes and teachers’ ideas on how arts and cultural education could be realized within the school day.

- **Municipal education departments** should offer providers of art and cultural services the possibility to use school facilities during and immediately after school hours.

- **Municipal culture and/or education departments** should prepare an arts and cultural education action plan for the municipality, linking this with the municipal or regional cultural wellbeing strategy when possible.

- **Comprehensive schools** should participate in the planning and implementation of the arts and cultural education plan.

- **Comprehensive School Principals** should support teachers to develop local models of collaboration both within and outside of the formal curriculum.

- **Comprehensive school principals** should provide in-service arts and cultural education training for teachers, and allocate sufficient resources for this training.

- **Providers of arts and cultural education services** should seek active cooperation with local schools, taking note of differences in organizational cultures.

**Problem**

There are notable inequalities among children and young people in Finland in terms of their access to arts and cultural services. The opportunity to participate in cultural activities and access public cultural services is strongly dependent on family education and socio-economic background.¹ The cultural capital of a child in turn enhances their academic competence and is connected to future educational choices.² Socio-economic and cultural factors feed a self-perpetuating cycle of privilege. Parents who have positive experiences of art and culture also want to make these experiences available to their children. In this way, social, material and cultural resources are passed from one generation to another. In contrast, low education and income levels generate cultural disparity and may sustain the cycle of disadvantage. Cultural inclusion – or exclusion – is more an inherited than an individual choice.³

A key Government of Finland initiative aiming to improve the accessibility of the arts and culture acknowledges that there are disparities in access to basic education in the arts and children’s culture in Finland.⁴ Even though there is a broad, national network of art schools, there are considerable inequalities in access to basic education in the arts. Only 12 % of Finnish children, i.e. 135 000 students, receive basic education in the arts. Even with public support, tuition fees (which in music also includes the high costs of instruments) prevent many children and youngsters from taking part. There are also regional differences in access to basic education in the arts. For example, the basic syllabus for basic education in the arts is most widely accessible in Southern Finland and the least accessible in Western and Inner Finland. There are also inequalities within cities. In Helsinki, for example, the arts and cultural supply varies strongly from district to district.⁵

There are also divisions in participation in arts and cultural education along gendered lines: Three out of four of all students in basic education in the arts are girls. With dance students, the percentage is as high as 90%. Architecture is the only field of study where a majority of the students is boys.⁶ The gender divide is also alarming with regards to arts education in schools: boys’ arts results are poorer and their attitudes towards artistic subjects are more negative than girls. The willingness to enroll for extracurricular studies in the arts is also divided by gender.⁷ It appears that access to arts education is affected by social and cultural attitudes connected to gender, where art subjects are seen in schools as feminine pursuits. These preconceptions restrict pupils’ space to move and freedom of choice to participate in the arts.⁸ Moreover, opportunities for children with disabilities and other individuals who require special support in art activities are very limited.⁹

**Only 12% of Finnish children have access to basic education in the arts. Three quarters of all students in basic education in the arts are girls.**

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¹ www.artsequal.fi

² www.artsequal.fi

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⁴ www.artsequal.fi

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⁹ www.artsequal.fi
The right to culture and the arts is widely recognized in international human rights conventions. In these policies, the value of art and culture is described as intrinsic, understood as natural phenomena of human life that are intertwined with civilization and democracy. Studying the arts enhances one’s ability to respect and take others into consideration, which is a prerequisite for democracy, and to empathize with the circumstances of other people. Arts education supports the development of a tolerant and understanding citizenry, and breaks down prejudices and stereotypes. The different forms of interaction and expression connected to artistic activities foster a sense of community, togetherness and shared meanings. Aesthetic experiences are a natural and necessary part of all human life. To live a meaningful life also requires the securing of one’s right to express oneself, play and use one’s imagination. People with disabilities and others who require special support should be ensured the possibility to experience and create art without barriers, through recognition of their right to self-determination and human integrity. The possibility to participate in the arts and culture is a basic need and right that belongs to all people.

Cultural inclusion and active citizenship are also among the key goals of Finland’s National Curriculum for Basic Education. Indeed, the core curriculum highlights the importance of supporting pupils’ extracurricular activities. There is solid empirical evidence for the positive effects of arts education on learning, wellbeing and the development of social skills. High-quality arts education strengthens learning skills, identity work, self-esteem and, most importantly, skills for encountering others. Art and arts education have proven to have holistic effects on wellbeing: they have been shown to enhance learning capacities, while reducing behavioral problems. This is especially evident in cases of pupils who need special support in schools. The ArtsEqual intervention studies in schools confirm these findings. Arts education also plays an important role in improving the school atmosphere. It is alarming that in 2016, approximately half of under 12-year-old schoolchildren felt some degree of cynicism towards school and 15 percent regarded school as insignificant for their future. A stronger status of the arts in schools could be a source of incentive, as engaging in the arts offers pupils possibilities to be active participants in school activities, express themselves and influence their learning environments. The indirect effects of arts education are manifested as improvements in the school atmosphere and a sense of community.

The government’s key project to improve the accessibility of the arts and culture allocates subsidies for after school clubs and recreational activities collaboratively coordinated by schools and the arts and culture sector, supporting the idea of a flexible school day. The pupils’ wishes, based on research surveys, and the specific needs of schools have been taken into consideration in the funding decisions. However, continuing research on these programs reveal that some problems have arisen in terms of collaboration. There have been challenges to the collaborative planning between schools and arts and cultural institutions: for example, differences in the organizational cultures have hampered cooperation. Research-based information gained from previous projects in this area should be better utilized in future collaborative developments.

In an ArtsEqual intervention study, the idea of including arts educational activities in the school day was positively welcomed: they have been found to give rise to, among other things, new pedagogical approaches and ways of interacting with pupils. Another intervention study showed that offering financially support and school premises for pupils to learn musical instruments immediately after the school day has encouraged more pupils to take up music as a hobby. Research also supports the notion that cultural stereotypes can be overcome when teaching in performing arts is offered to all pupils regardless of their differences, for example, gender.

### Comprehensive school as a cultural center

Finland’s comprehensive school system can become Finland’s largest cultural center if it engages in closer collaboration with arts and cultural education, especially on a cross-sectoral dimension. In this way, it would be possible to cross regional, socio-economic, cultural and economic boundaries and boundaries connected to learning capacities or gender issues, as well as approach differences between individuals and organizational cultures as an asset and a resource. Comprehensive school education reaches all children in any given age group. The teachers’ pedagogical skills and knowledge of pupils serve as a solid foundation for high-quality arts education. Professionals from arts and cultural institutions can enrich school culture by participating in the arts education offered in schools during the school day and by introducing new practices to schools. Cultural equality can be increased by offering extracurricular arts and cultural activities in schools immediately after the school day, making them easily accessible to all pupils. What is essential is that all parties respect one another, learn about other organizational cultures, recognize the individual needs and development of a child or young person and support their growth.

- We propose in this policy brief that schools are developed into a cultural center that embraces equality and where
- cross-disciplinary arts education is an integral part of the comprehensive school system
- arts and culture are offered through clubs and other extracurricular activities
- the effects of the arts and culture that support personal development reach all children and young people regardless of age, gender, residence or socio-economic background
Sources


