

## THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN EDUCATION IN FINLAND

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### ***1. Religious instruction organised during the school hours (in lower and in secondary education) in state funded schools***

**I.1 Question: Religious instruction organised during the school hours (in lower and in secondary education) in state funded schools. Is – and if affirmative please refer to the provisions in the law (add the text separately) – the teaching of religion in your country organised during school time in public educational institutions: in primary education, in secondary education.**

Yes, religious instruction is organised during the school hours in state funded schools:

- in basic education (ages 7-15/16);
- in the general (academic) track of upper secondary education (ages 15/16 - 18/19).
- in pre-school education, to which each child permanently residing in Finland has a subjective right (but no obligation) during the year preceding the beginning of compulsory schooling

In vocational track of secondary education, there is no instruction in religion.

The relevant provisions in Basic Education Act (628/1998) read as follows:

Section 11.1. “The basic education syllabus shall contain, ... the following core subjects: ... religious education or ethics, ... “

Section 13.1. (Amendment 454/2003). The provider of basic education shall provide religious education in accordance with the religion of the majority of pupils. In this case, religious education is arranged in conformity with the religious community to which the majority of pupils belong. A pupil who does not belong to this religious community may attend the said religious education after the provider of basic education has been notified of the matter by the parent/carer. Section 13.4. 4. If a pupil belongs to more than one religious community, the pupil's parent/carer shall decide in which religious education the pupil will participate.

Upper Secondary Education Act, Section 9.1. (6.6.2003/455) is similar to Basic Education Act, except that the pupils themselves may make the choices instead of their parents.

**I.2 Question: What choices amongst the religious education possibilities are offered in public educational institutions , e.g. catholic religion, Islamic teaching, ....**

**Answer:**

In Finland, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Greek Orthodox Church are governed by special legislation. Denominational teaching other than Evangelical-Lutheran and the Orthodox is given if there are at least three pupils belonging to the same religious community, registered as an association, and their parents request it. In Upper secondary school the request is to be made by the student herself/himself.

The relevant provisions in Basic Education Act (628/1998, Amendment 454/2003) read as follows:

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Section 13.2. Three or more pupils belonging to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church or the Orthodox Church who do not participate in religious education referred to in subsection 1 shall be provided education in accordance with their own religion.

Section 13.3. Three or more pupils belonging to a religious community other than those referred to in subsection 2 who do not participate in religious education referred to in subsection 1 shall be provided religious education in accordance with their own religion, if their parents/carers so request.

Pupils/students that are not members of any congregation or religious group are provided instruction in secular ethics. The relevant provisions in Basic Education Act (628/1998) read as follows:

Section 13.5. Pupils who do not belong to any religious community and do not take part in religious education referred to in subsection 1 shall be taught ethics. A pupil belonging to a religious community who is not provided religious education in accordance with his or her religion shall be taught ethics when requested by his or her parent/carer. The provider of basic education shall organise ethics education if there are at least three pupils entitled to it.

Section 13.6. A pupil who does not belong to any religious community may, at the request of his or her parent/carer, also participate in religious education provided by the provider of basic education which, in view of his or her upbringing and cultural background, evidently corresponds to his or her religious beliefs.

Students that begin upper secondary school when they have reached the age of 18 may choose whether they wish to study RE or ethics. A non-Lutheran pupil may take part in Lutheran RE if their guardians so request. In the case of the Orthodox instruction, a parental request is not needed: instruction is provided once there are at least 3 Orthodox children in municipality schools.

## ***II. State funded denominational schools and state supervision***

**II.1. Question: Are there state funded denominational schools in your country? If affirmative, what is the numeric importance of state funded schools. If affirmative, what is the numeric importance of Islamic state funded schools. Please refer to statistical information on-line**

Yes. There are state-funded denominational schools in Finland, but the numeric importance of these schools is reportedly insignificant. Less than 3% of pupils in compulsory school age attend private schools.

**II.2. Question: Are there non-state funded denominational schools in your country (private)? If affirmative, what is the numeric importance of private schools? If affirmative, what is the numeric importance of Islamic private schools? Please refer to statistical information on-line**

The number of private schools providing basic education is currently 75, of which denominational Christian schools compose 5% and Steiner/Freinet or other, faith-related, schools 8%. The average size of private schools is reportedly small. Homeschooling is allowed but rare. In general, Finnish schools are not based on religion or supported by a religion. There are no Islamic state-funded schools in Finland.

There are no non-state-funded denominational schools in Finland.

For statistical information on-line, see [http://www.stat.fi/til/kou\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/kou_en.html)

**II.3. Question: How do the authorities control the teaching in state funded denominational schools and are there any special questions about the control of the content of teaching in state-funded denominational schools? Please refer to the provisions in the law.**

The authorities control the teaching in state-funded denominational schools in the following ways:

- All private registered associations or foundations that want to provide basic education shall receive an authorization from the State Government.
- All Finnish teachers are required to be Master's degree graduates, no matter whether they teach primary or secondary students. The majority of subject teachers in RE are Masters of Theology who have specialized in teaching.
- All RE must have a curriculum which needs to be accepted by the National Board of Education. There are 11 different curricula for the RE.

**III. Refusal or limitations on the number of pupils of another conviction/belief by the governing board of a confessional (catholic) school**

**III.1. Question: Does the head of a state funded denominational (e.g. Catholic) school have the right to refuse pupils from other religious beliefs? Please refer to the provisions in the law.**

Non-Discrimination Act (21/2004, amended by several acts) aims to foster and safeguard equality and non-discrimination in several sectors of public and private activities, but it is not unambiguous whether the Non-Discrimination Act is applicable to school enrolment procedures. The English translation of the Non-Discrimination Act mentions “training” – but not “education” – among the contexts in which the Act shall apply (Section 2.3). Section 3.1 explicitly mentions that the Non-Discrimination Act does not apply to “the aims or content of education or the education system”.

**III.2. Question: Does the head of a state funded denominational (e.g. Catholic) school have the authority to limit the number of pupils from other religious beliefs (e.g. Muslim pupils) in order to support the specificity of the project?**

n/a (see III.1. above)

**IV. Point of views of the authorities concerning the teaching of Islam in denominational (Catholic) education, Islam instruction or instruction on other convictions/beliefs in denominational (catholic) schools for (a number of pupils requesting it) and alternative ethical course**

**IV.1. Question. Is there a legal obligation to organise, if parents ask for, classes of Islamic religion in denominational (Catholic) education funded by public authorities? a. for any pupil for whom a request has been made? b. from a minimum number of pupils for whom a request has been made?**

- a. no.
- b. yes. Schools must give instruction in Islam or any other religions other than Lutheran faith if there is a minimum of three pupils representing the faith in the school. The religion in question must be registered in Finland and the students’ family must belong to the religion (see above, I.2).

**IV.2. Question. Does the same obligation exist for the offer of (a) other religions and/or philosophical convictions, (b) an alternative class of conception of life, philosophy, ethics**

- a. yes. The religion in question must be registered in Finland and the students' family must belong to the religion.
- b. yes.

**IV.3. Question. Can you shortly mention the pro and contra standpoints that have been expressed concerning the respect of fundamental rights (among others, freedom of education and right to education) in relation with this obligation?**

Pro: religious education is a fundamental right; as an essential part of religious freedom. There has also been public debate on the establishment of an Islamic School in Finland. Those arguing for it say that it is a better alternative than Islamic parents sending their children to Islamic schools abroad.

Con: religious education does not belong to public sphere; belief is a private issue. For instance, the Minister of Immigration (April 2007 to date) has stated as her opinion that no Islamic schools shall be established in Finland. Rather, more efforts should be spent in training of teachers of Islam (Helsingin Sanomat 6.2.2010).

**IV.4. Question. Reference to the legal basis, with Website address, and also if possible to the parliamentary preparation of texts.**

**Answer:**

***V. Teaching of Islam in denominational (e.g. Catholic) schools at their own initiative***

**V.1. Question: Is there in your country a general guideline for teaching of Islam in denominational (e.g. Catholic) schools at their own initiative defined by (a) the Bishops' Conference, (b) another body, namely.**

All providers of basic education shall receive an authorization from the State Government, and all RE must have a curriculum which needs to be accepted by the National Board of Education.

**V.2. Question: If affirmative, does the guideline imply that (a) the teaching of other religions is organised when: one parent asks for, or a sufficient number of parents ask for (how many?), (b) only teaching of Islam is offered as alternative religion when one parent asks for or a sufficient number of parents ask for (how many?)**

The law stipulates that whenever parents/guardians of three or more pupils belonging to a registered religious community so request, their children shall be provided religious education in accordance with their own religion.

**V.3. Question: There is no guideline and: (a) in fact, teaching of Islam is never proposed in Catholic schools, or (b) the teaching of Islam is organised in some schools, which have taken themselves the initiative. If possible, explain the importance of this option**

**Answer:** n/a

***VI. Religious symbols in public schools***

**VI.1. Question: Are religious symbols (e.g. crucifix) in public schools compulsory, allowed, or forbidden?**

Religious symbols in public schools are allowed, but not compulsory.

**VI.2. Question: Is a teacher allowed to wear the Islamic headscarf and manifest her religion? Please explain if not allowed on which grounds.**

there are no legal rules on dress codes in public schools.

**VI.3. Question: Is a pupil allowed to wear the Islamic headscarf and manifest her religion? Please explain if not allowed on which grounds.**

there are no legal rules on dress codes in public schools.

**VI.4. Question: Who decides on the dress code in schools. Please refer to the law.**

no legal regulation exist on this particular topic

**VI.5. Question: Can a pupil and/or a teacher be exempted from the dress code when she considers it her religious duty to wear the Islamic headscarf?**

no

**VI.6. Question: Who is the regulatory authority in this sphere?**

not defined by law

**VI.7. Question: What kind of disciplinary measures and proceedings are taken if the pupil or teacher fails to comply with the rules on dress codes?**

n/a

**VI.8. Question: Please describe the case-law in your country.**

No case-law on religious symbols in public schools can be found in the databases of the Supreme Court, nor the Supreme Administrative Court.

## **VII. Additional comments**

RE in Finland is non-confessional. According to the Criteria for Good Learning Practice at the fifth grade concerning Lutheran RE, as defined by the National Board of Education in 2003, the pupils should be able to perceive religion as a cultural phenomenon and understand the nature of religious language usage and recognize religious symbols, concepts, and metaphors.

### ***VII. After-school education in private religious institutions. Islamic instruction organised after the school hours (age 6-18)***

**VII.1. Question: Is there any form of Islamic teaching (for children and youngsters of age 6-18) in your country organised after school time in private religious institutions:**

**Answer:** Morning and afternoon activities (or Before and After School Activities ) are provided for children in grades 1–2 of basic education and for children admitted or transferred to special needs education in all grades. Improving the well-being of pupils is at the core of the provision of morning and afternoon activities. Pre-primary and basic education, morning and evening activities and basic art education build the foundation for the growth, learning and comprehensive well-being of children and young people.

There is no obligation to the local authorities to organise these activities. If a local authority organises morning and afternoon activities, it may provide these itself or may purchase services from other local authorities, joint municipal authorities, organisations working with children and young people, associations and parishes, etc.

The National Core Curriculum for Before- and After-school Activities for Schoolchildren is defined by the Finnish National Board of Education.

**VII.2. Question: Is there any form of Islamic teaching in your country organised in primary education age (6-12)**

**Answer:** The Islamic Council of Finland has a board for youth and student issues. The promotion of good quality Islamic teaching is mentioned as one of the board tasks. No reply to the e-mail question on the scale of their activities. <http://www.sine.fi/>

**VII.3. Question: Is there any form of Islamic teaching in your country organised in secondary education age (12-18)**

**Answer:** n/a (see VII.2 above).

**VII.4. Question: How many such institutions are there in your country providing Islamic instruction organised after the school hours?**

**Answer:** n/a (see VII.2 above).

**VII.5. Question: How many children take part in the activities of Islamic instruction organised after the school hours?**

**Answer:** n/a (see VII.2 above).

**VII.6. Question: How is the pedagogical quality of Islamic instruction organised after the school hours safeguarded?**

**Answer:** n/a (see VII.2 above).

**VII.7. Question: How would you characterize the public debate about this form of Islamic instruction organised after the school hours?**

**Answer:** no public debate on this topic

**VIII. Additional comments**

**XI. Bibliography**

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