



UNIVERSITY OF  
EASTERN FINLAND

# **Introduction to Finnish special education and three-tiered support**

DECIDE RIGHT – staff training

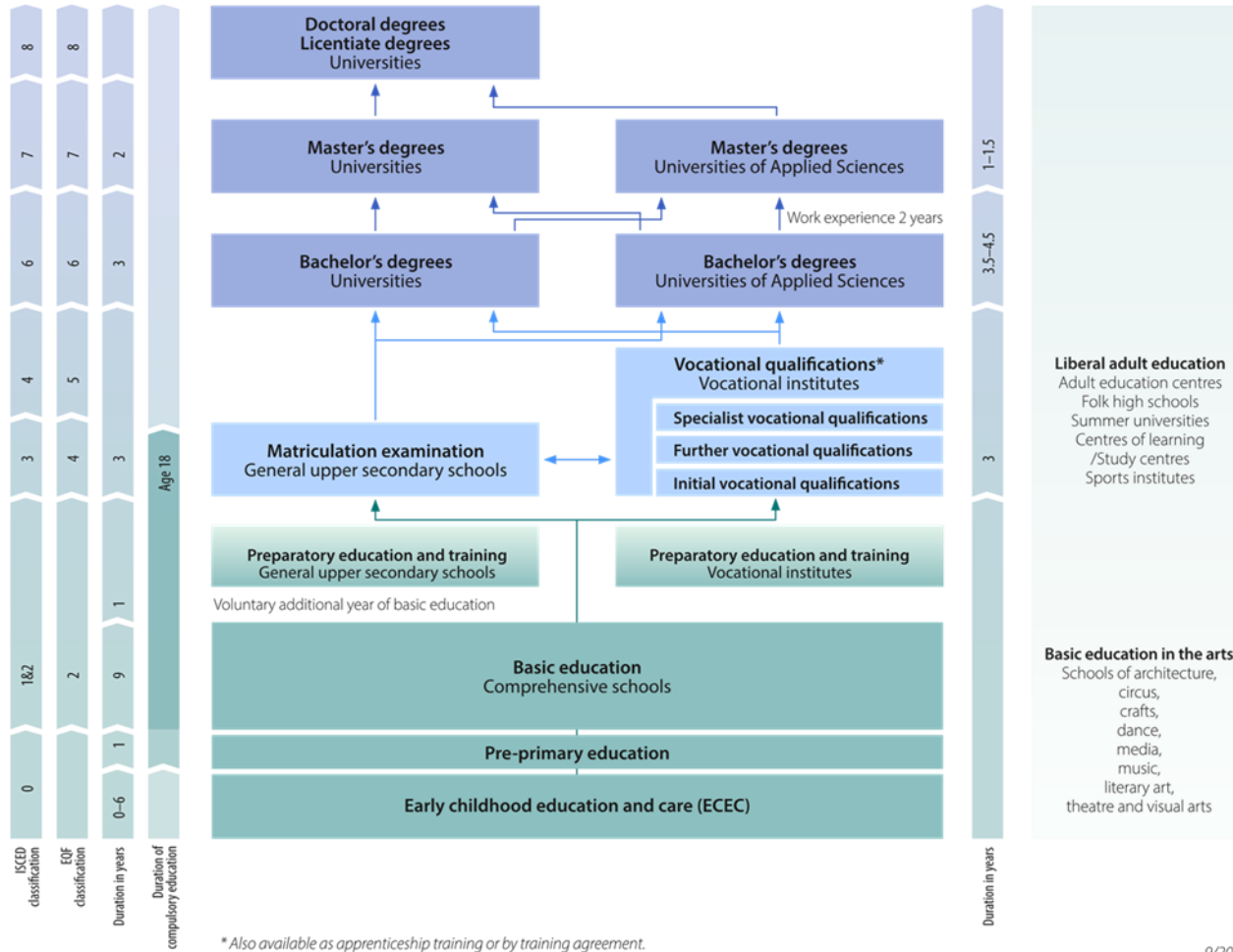
22th November 2021

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# Content of the presentation

- **Education system in Finland**
- **Some key principles of Finnish educational policy**
- **Three-tiered support**
- **Assessment process in three-tiered support**
- **Inclusive education in Finnish and European context**
- **Concluding remarks**

# Education system in Finland



9/2021

# Some key principles of Finnish educational policy

## Well-being

- Finland is considered one of the top countries that invests in the well-being of its citizens
- Education is a key element of the welfare of Finnish society
- The best way to increase the welfare to provide high quality education to all
- According to the Constitution of Finland:
  - All people should have an equal opportunity to receive education according to their abilities and special needs

# Autonomy

- The Basic Education Act, the National Core Curriculum for Pre – primary Education, and the Core Curriculum for Basic Education provide general frameworks for the provision education and support
- Municipalities and schools develop their own local curriculums that are based on national curriculum but have some municipality-specific and/or school-specific emphasis (for example, art, mathematics)
- Education providers and teachers have pedagogical freedom to organize instruction and support in educational settings
- The evaluation procedures in Finland are less centralized than in many other countries
- The emphasis is on the self-evaluation of the education providers
- The education providers (municipalities and teachers) decide on the methods used and the frequency of quality assurance

# Prevention and early identification

- According to the Basic Education Act, a student has the right to receive adequate support for learning and schooling as soon as the need for support arises
- Teaching and support based the strengths and learning and development needs of both each student and the teaching group
- Special attention on the accessibility of learning and the prevention and early identification of learning difficulties
- The provision for support is flexible and vary from temporary to continuous, from mild to strong, from the need for one form to more than one form of support
- The purpose of the support is to prevent the exclusion, deepening of the problems, and their long-term impact

# Inclusion

- Inclusion is the official educational policy
- Finland has ratified to over 40 declarations and conventions regarding inclusive education
- Most important and recent ones:
  - Salamanca Statement 1994
  - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006
- Support is given primarily in student's own teaching group and school unless the student's interest requires the transfer of to another teaching group or school
- Identification of the progress of students' learning and the schooling is constantly assessed

## Assessment involves:

- The previous assessment and planning of support (if exists) used as the basis
- Examination of the procedures, teaching arrangements and learning environments used in the school and their suitability for the student
- It is assessed whether by changing better pedagogical solutions can be implemented for the student.
- Pedagogical expertise and multidisciplinary collaboration between teachers and other support professionals in identifying, assessing, and planning and implementing support
- The professionals involved in the cooperation considered on a case-by-case basis

# Teacher training

- Teachers are trained in master's degree programs in seven universities.
  - Teacher training schools
- Separate degree programs for classroom, subject and special education teachers
- Six universities provide master's degree programs in Special Education
- Special education teachers/special classroom teachers
  - Special classroom teachers work in special classroom in mainstream schools or special schools
  - Special education teachers work as part time special education teachers

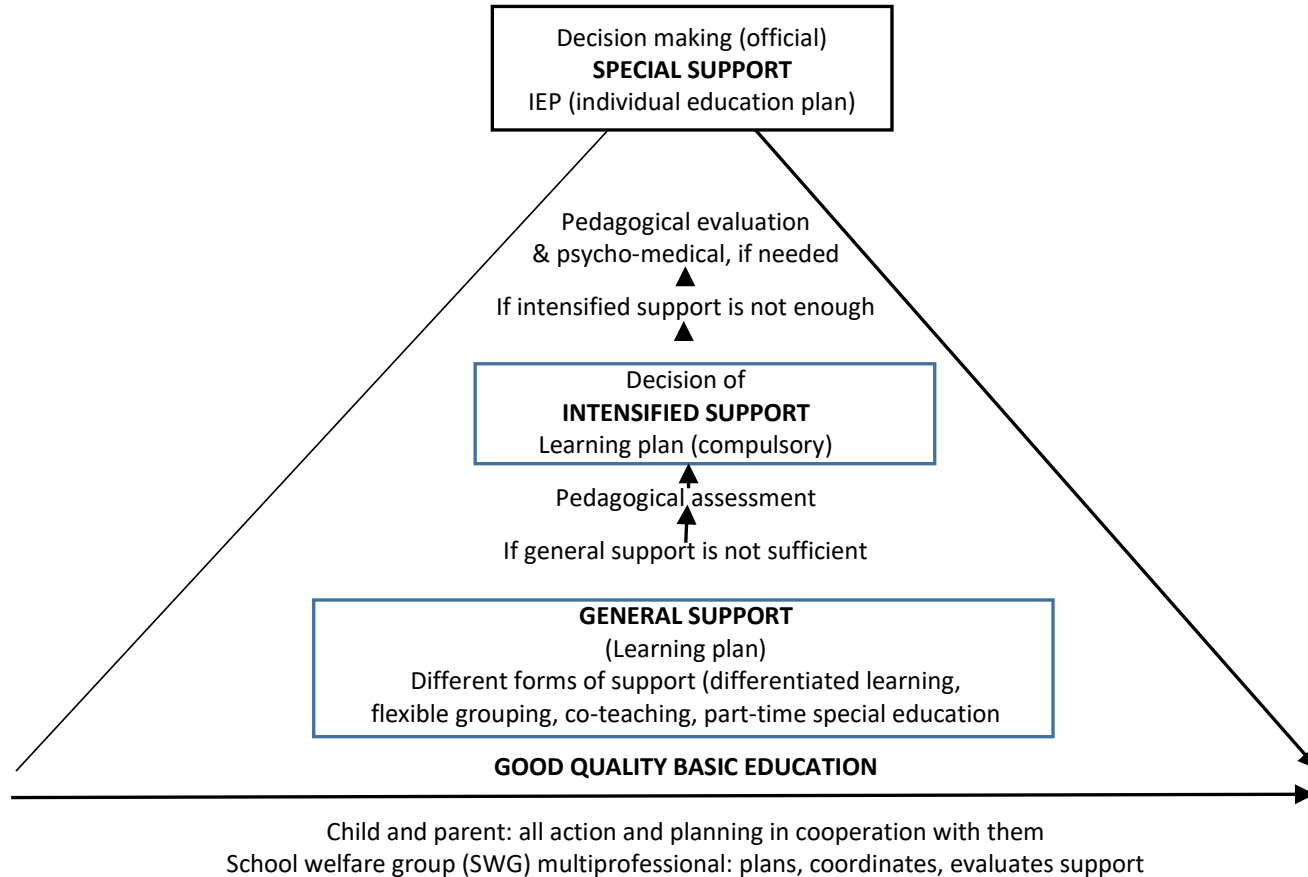
# Three-tiered support



(Picture: Pixapay)

- In January 2011, Finland implemented its latest educational legislation; The amendments to the Basic Education Act (642/2010)
- The aim of the changed legislation was to support inclusion and to reduce placements in full-time special educational settings
- The three-tiered support system was developed to guarantee fulfilling the children's right to support
- Three-tiered support was designed much like the Response-to-Intervention model (Björn et al., 2016; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006)

- The three-tiered support is structured in a manner that the level of support could be easily changed if the needs of the child changed
- Early recognition of needs and the provision of individualized support are the guiding principles of the three-tiered support model
- The three tiers of support are general support, intensified support, and special support



# Assessment process in three-tiered support



(Picture: Pixapay)

# General support

- Available for all students in pre- and comprehensive school
- Identification of the need for support is done by teachers, part-time special education teachers, parents and/or students themselves.
- A part-time special education teacher's services are available in all pre- and comprehensive schools for all students, no diagnosis needed
- Teachers (in collaboration with part-time special education teachers) make a plan how to support children with special educational needs

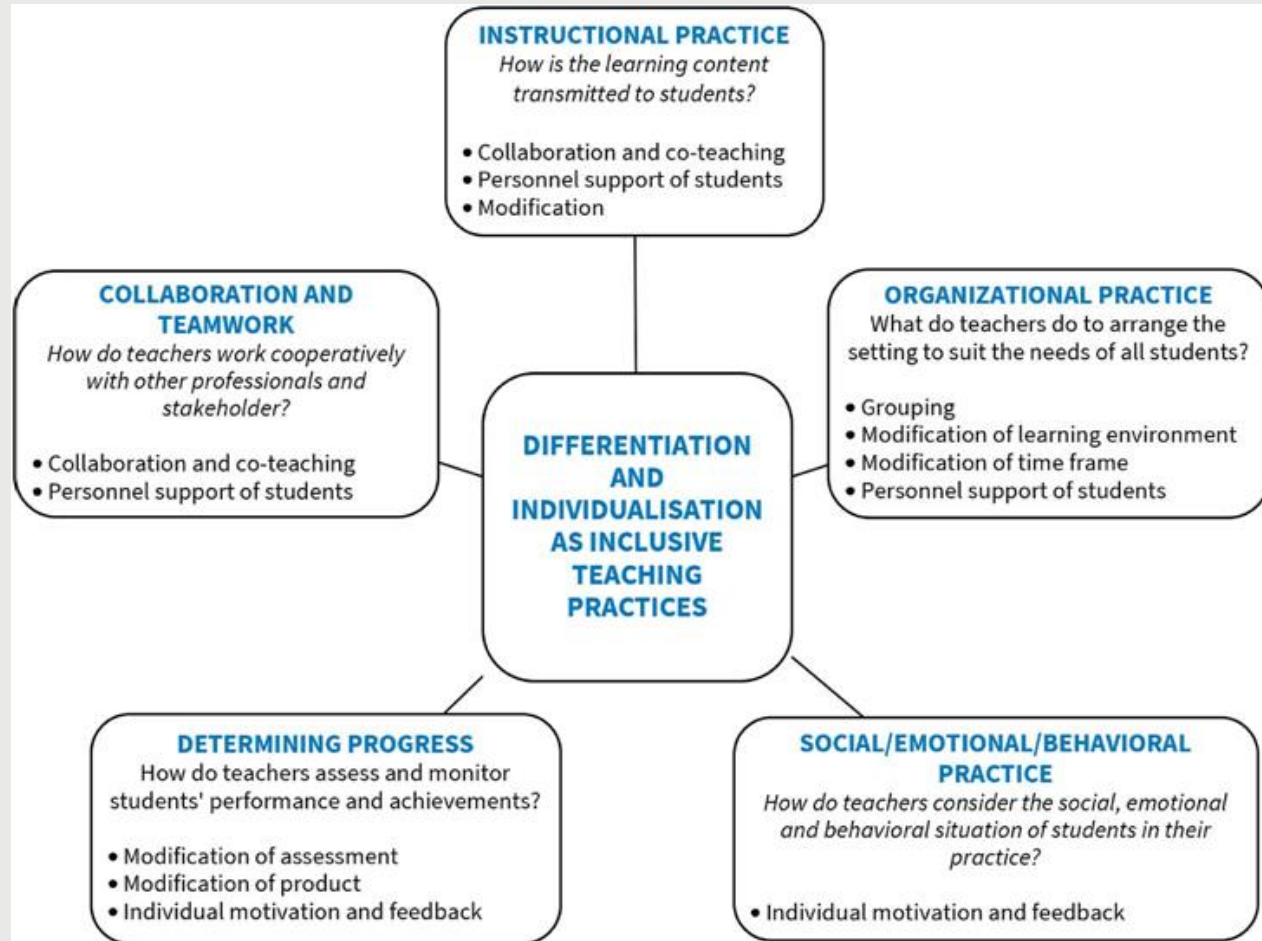
## Part-time special education

- Focus typical on learning difficulties (reading, writing, math)
- Focus on supporting social and emotional problems or speech problems (mainly articulation)
- Support given: individually, in small groups or by using team-teaching model
- Support given: once or twice a week for a student/student group
- The support lasts as long as the student needs (from some weeks to years)
- Continuous evaluation is done continuously + more through evaluation in the beginning and at the end of the school
- Some standardised national screening tests are available/used

- Support can also include:
  - remedial education
  - differentiated teaching
  - flexible teaching
  - team-teaching
  - part-time special education
  - interpretation services
  - assistance services
  - special aids
- If general support is not enough process for giving intensified support is started

# Implementation of differentiation and individualization

(Lindner & Schwab, 2020)



# Intensified support



(Picture: Pixapay)

- The support is given for a student pupil who needs regular support or several forms of support at the same time.
- The initiation and organization of enhanced support, based on pedagogical assessment, is done multi-professionally in co-operation with student care professionals.
- In order to prepare a learning plan, a pedagogical assessment is made
- The learning plan must be drawn up, in the absence of obvious obstacles, in cooperation with the pupil and the guardian
- The support is given in accordance with the learning plan
- The plan is reviewed annually or when needed

## Content of pedagogical assessment for intensified support:

- Participants and responsible teacher
- Description of collaboration between guardians and students
- Description of student's overall situation at school (strength etc.) from professional's, guardians' and student's point of view
- Description how general support has been given (e.g. part-time special education...)
- Description how what kind of support would help student
- Documents used (e.g. rehabilitation plan, previous pedagogical plan, other statements)



(Picture: Pixapay)

# Content of pedagogical plan for intensified support

- Participants and a responsible teacher
- Description of collaboration between guardians and students
- Student's view of his/her goals and the areas of interest
- Student's strengths, learning skills, and special needs
- Learning environment and support arrangements (e.g. teaching methods, part-time special education)
- Methods used for evaluation that are appropriate for the student to show his/her know-how
- Cooperation with the student and the guardian, support provided by the guardian
- Support provided by student welfare group and other experts
- Documents used (e.g., rehabilitation plan, pedagogical assessment)

# Special support



(Picture: Pixapay)

- Students with multiple or profound support needs have right to get special support
- The education provider must make a written decision, which will be reviewed at least after the second grade and before moving to the seventh grade.
- The decision includes information on:
  - the student's main teaching group,
  - any interpretation and assistant services and other needed service
  - the special teaching arrangements
  - the individualization of the subject curriculum
- If new subjects need to be individualized, a new decision on special support will be taken.

- Before a decision on special support, the education provider must consult the student and his or her guardian or legal representative
- A pedagogical statement is conducted to map the need for student support
- The assessment is made on a multi-professional basis in collaboration with student welfare professionals
- If necessary, the pedagogical assessment can be supplemented with expert opinions
- A decision on special support may be made before or during pre-primary or primary education without prior pedagogical assessment and decision on intensified support if a psychological or medical assessment shows that the pupil's education is not possible to arrange otherwise.

## Content of pedagogical statement for special support

- Participants and a responsible teacher
- Description of collaboration between guardians, students and professionals /student welfare group)
- Statement from the responsible teachers
- Statement of intensified or special support received by a student
- Statement on the overall situation of student's learning and schooling

- Assessment of the impact of different forms of support
- Students' strengths and interests, learning skills and special needs
- Assessment of what kind of support is needed
- Assessment whether the student needs a personalized curriculum in one or more subjects
- Documents used for preparation (e.g. pedagogical plan, psychological or medical statements)



(Picture: Pixapay)

# Content of Individual education plan for special support

- Participants and a responsible teacher
- Description of collaboration between guardians, students and professionals
- Student's view of his/her goals and the areas of interest
- Student's strengths, learning skills, and special needs
- The goals for the students learning and student's development such as socio-emotional and motor skills
- Subjects, subject groups, and optional studies that the student studies + weekly studying hours
- Learning environment and support arrangements (e.g. teaching methods, part-time special education)

- Arrangement of the student's teaching in regular and / or in a special class
- Special education given to the student studying in a mainstream classroom
- A mainstream co-operation class designated for the student studying in a special class
- Organization of interpretation and assistance services, other educational services, aids and rehabilitation services
- Cooperation with the student and the guardian, support provided by the guardian
- Support provided by student welfare group and other experts
- Student's participation in the morning and afternoon activities
- Arrangements and responsibilities for the student's school transportation

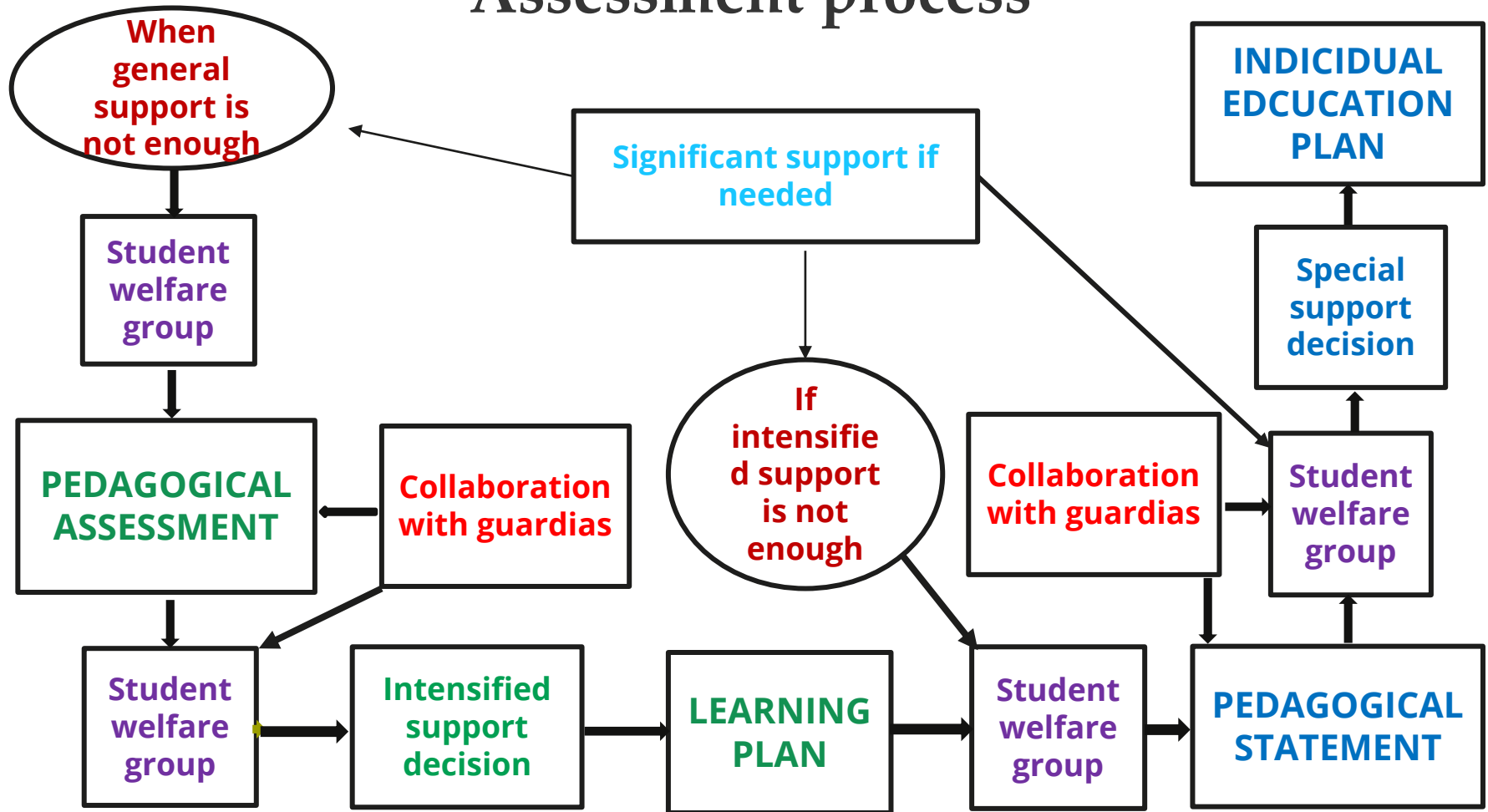


(Picture: Pixapay)

## Significant support

- In addition to three-tiered support students can also get significant support
- Supplements three-tiered support but is not based on Comprehensive School Act
- Is provided for students who have multiple problems and need extensive multi-professional support
- Support often include extensive collaboration with professionals such as
  - specialised medical care services in hospitals (e.g., psychiatric wards) and/or
  - Valteri, the National Centre for Learning and Consulting that operates under the Finnish National Agency for Education.

# Assessment process

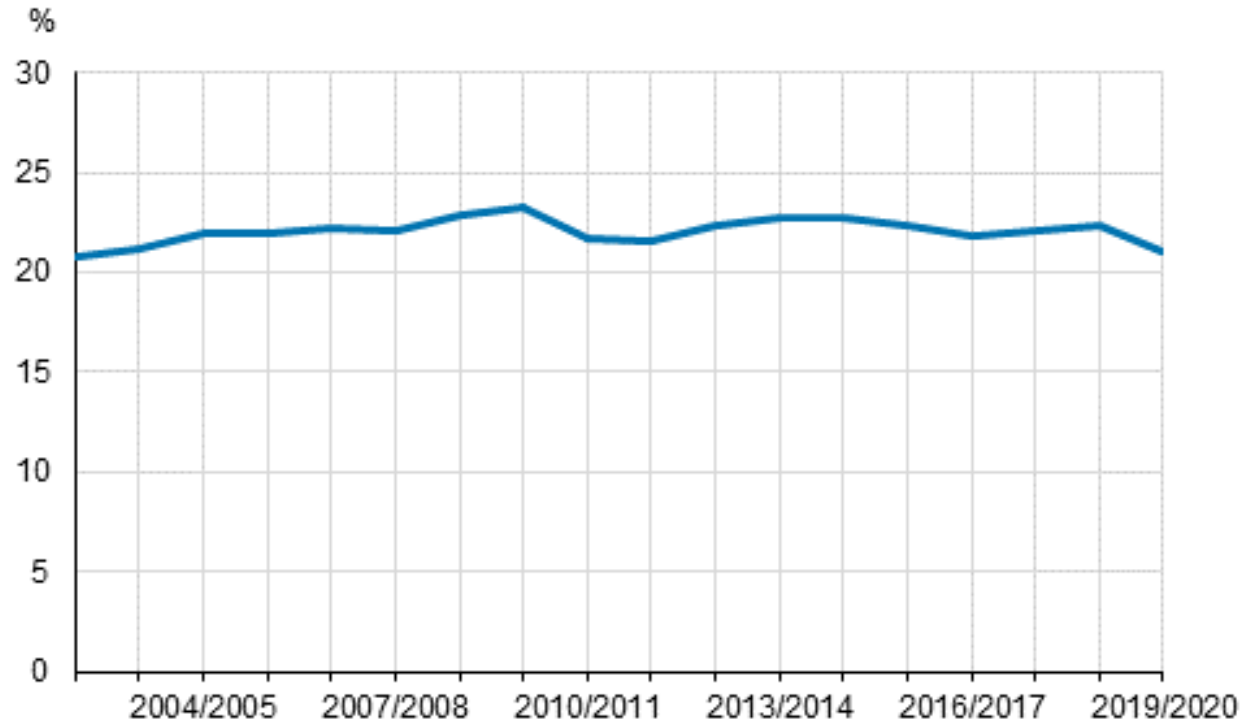


# Inclusive education in Finnish and European context

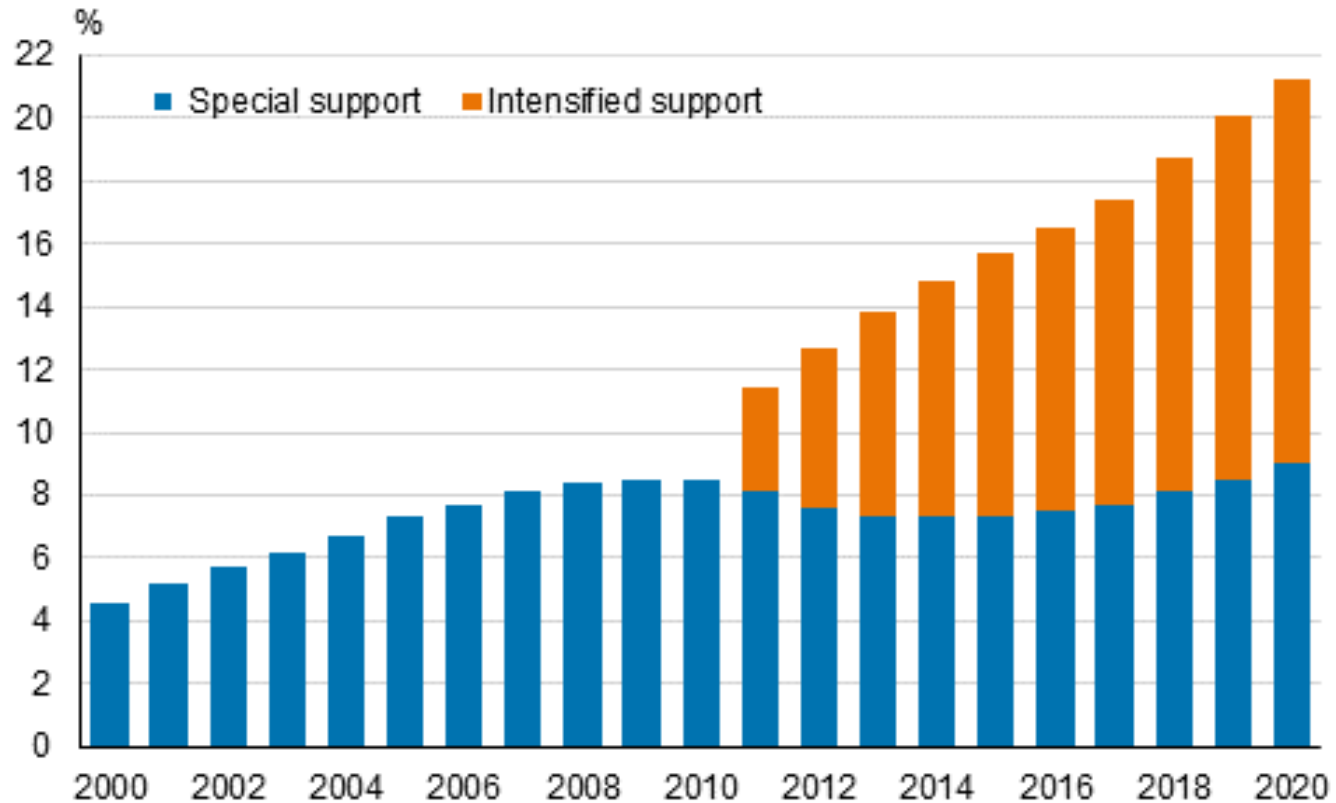


(Picture: Pixapay)

# Share of comprehensive school pupils having received part-time special education among all comprehensive school pupils in academic years 2002/2003 to 2019/2020, % (Official Statistics of Finland, 2021)



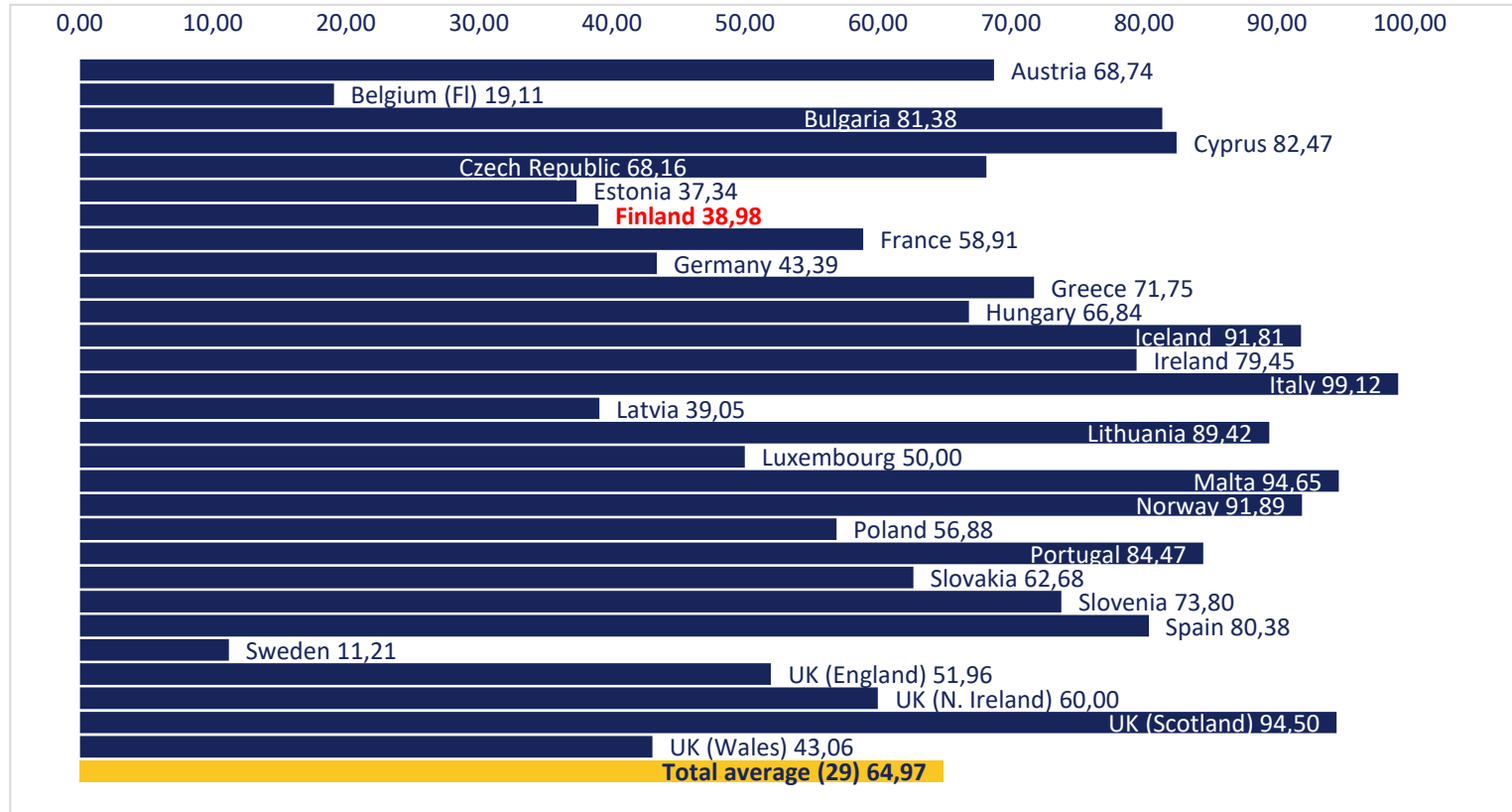
# Share of comprehensive school pupils having received intensified or special support among all comprehensive school pupils 2000–2020 (Official Statistics of Finland, 2021)



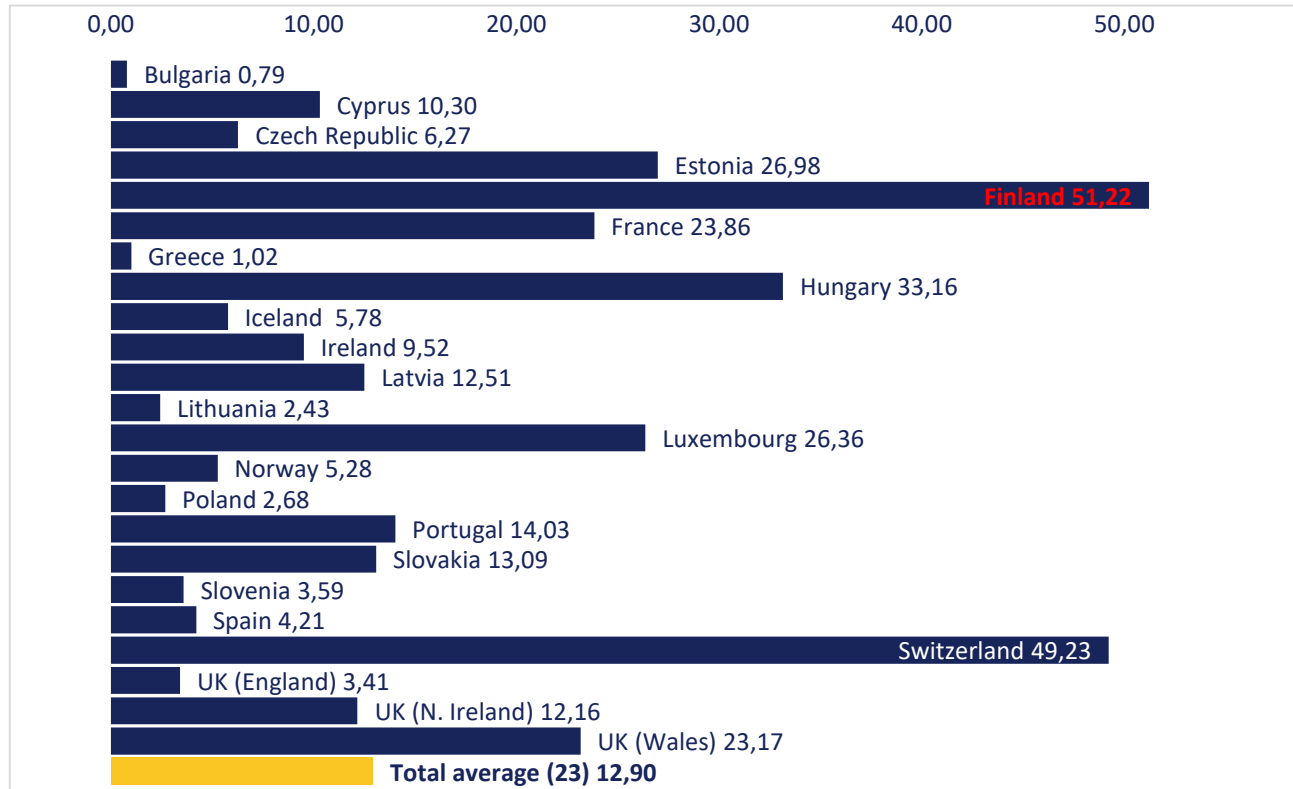
# Comprehensive school pupils having received special support by place of provision of teaching 2021 (Statistics Finland, 2021)

<i>Place of provision of teaching</i>	<i>Total, %</i>
<i>Teaching fully in a special group, special school</i>	<i>6,5</i>
<i>Teaching fully in a special group, other than special school</i>	<i>27,0</i>
<i>1–19% of teaching in a general education group</i>	<i>13,4</i>
<i>20–49% of teaching in a general education group</i>	<i>9,7</i>
<i>50–79% of teaching in a general education group</i>	<i>11,2</i>
<i>80–100% of teaching in a general education group</i>	<i>32,1</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>

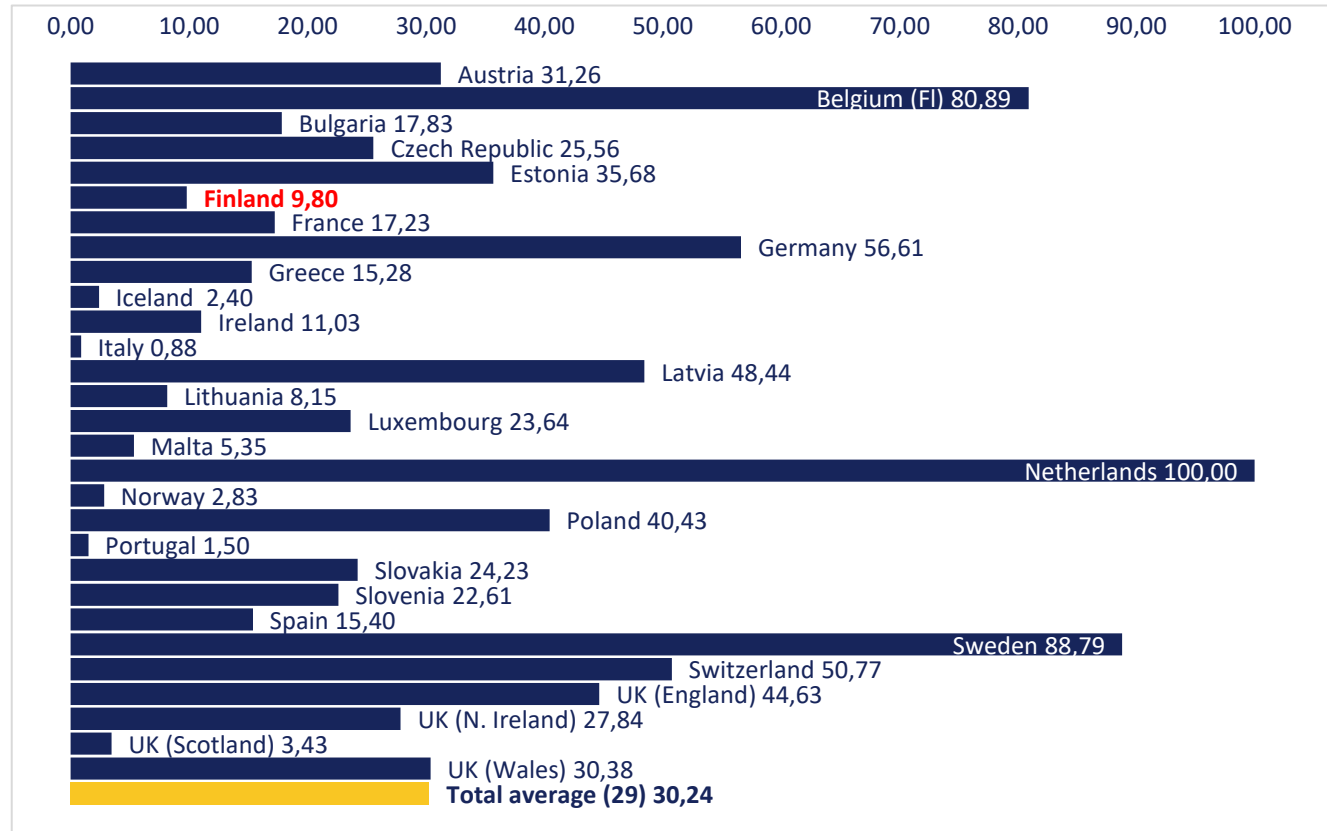
# Percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in inclusive education, based on the population of learners with an official decision of SEN (%) (EASNIE, 2018)



Percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN **in special classes**, based on the population of learners with an official decision of SEN (%) (EASNIE, 2018)



# Percentage of learners with an official decision of SEN in special schools, based on the population of learners with an official decision of SEN (%) (EASNIE, 2018)



# Barriers and promoters/enablers of inclusive education

## Barriers

- Unclear/fuzzy definition of inclusion
- Limited knowledge on inclusion
- General attitudes/beliefs
- Lack of financial and human resources
- Limited number of courses on inclusive education in teacher education
- Limited in-service training

## Promoters/enablers

- Stable and well-functioning society
- Legislation
- Well-functioning school system
- Well-educated teachers
- Teachers' high status in the society
- Teachers' pedagogical autonomy

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## Concluding remarks

- Finnish educational policy and practices are built on the principles of well-being, autonomy, prevention and early identification, and inclusion
- The goal of the three-tiered system is to support and enhance students with special educational needs in mainstream settings
- The assessment and provision of support and is based on close collaboration with students, guardians and professionals
- The assessment is continuous and three tiers provide tools for it
- Students can move from one tier to another in a flexible manner
- The number of students who need special support in inclusive classrooms is increasing
- Students with special educational needs study most typically in special classes in mainstream schools

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*Thank you!*  
*Teşekkürler*  
*Kiitos!*

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