

Inspectorate Profile

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), Finland

September 2024

1. Overview of the Inspectorate

Age of inspectorate

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) has been in operation since May 2014. It is a combination of three previous organisations: the Unit for learning outcomes at the Finnish National Board of Education, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council at the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish Education Evaluation Council. All these previous organisations have a long history in evaluation: The development of the national learning outcomes assessment model began in the Board of Education in the mid-1990s, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council at the Ministry of Education and Culture was established in 1995 and the Finnish Education Evaluation Council was established in 2003.

Structure of inspectorate

FINEEC is a separate unit responsible for the external evaluation at all levels of education in Finland. When established, FINEEC was an independent government agency. From 1st January 2018, FINEEC was attached to the organisation of the Finnish National Agency for Education as a separate unit. In practice, this means that FINEEC will retain financial and substance independence as an independent evaluation authority but will use the common support services of the administration of the National Agency.

FINEEC's organization is divided into four different units:

- General Education
- Vocational Education and Early Childhood Education
- Higher Education and Liberal Adult Education
- Development Services

FINEEC has two offices. The headquarters are in Helsinki and there is also a smaller office in Jyväskylä. FINEEC's evaluations cover the whole state. The evaluation results create impact and are used in making important societal decisions as well as decisions at the national and the local level.

Size

The overall number of staff is approximately 40. The majority of personnel is working with the evaluations. Development services consists of the persons specialised in methodology,

communications, administration, digitalisation of evaluation activities and strategic development. FINEEC is led by a director and each of the four units have their own head of unit.

Remits

The evaluations of FINEEC cover the education system in its entirety, from early childhood education and care (ECEC) to higher education.

Unit of inspection

FINEEC does not inspect schools or providers. We implement external learning outcomes evaluations for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary and vocational education and training. Moreover, FINEEC's duties include supporting education and ECEC providers as well as HEIs in issues related to evaluation and quality assurance, as well as to develop education evaluation. The aim of the evaluations is to develop education and to support learning while ensuring the quality of education. The evaluations also produce information for local, regional, and national decision-making on education as well as development work and international comparison.

Purpose of inspectorate

FINEEC acts as an independent expert organisation in the evaluation of education and early childhood education and care (ECEC). We produce evaluation-based information to support decision-making in education policy as well as the development of education and ECEC.

Provisions on the duties and organisation of FINEEC are laid down in Act [1295/2013](#) and Government decree [1317/2013](#).

FINEEC's statutory task

- to conduct evaluations related to education and ECEC as well as the activities of ECEC, education and training providers and higher education institutions
- to carry out learning outcomes evaluations in accordance to the Basic Education Act, the Act on General Upper Secondary Education, the Vocational Education and Training Act and the Act on Basic Education in the Arts
- to support ECEC providers and education and training providers in matters related to quality management
- to develop the evaluation of education and ECEC
- to attend to any other duties that are issued or given to it

What is your strapline/motto?

"Foresight and effective evaluation"

Relationship with government

FINEEC is an independent evaluation authority. The Ministry of Education and Culture is the first one we are obligated to inform about results of evaluations. However, independence is the key operating principle of FINEEC. It refers to the freedom of evaluation methods, organisation, and results from the influence of, for example, the ministry, National Agency,

or other parties. We are allowed to report on government policy and publish reports without government approval.

Accountability

The themes and schedules of FINEEC's future evaluations are determined in the National Plan for Education Evaluations ([current plan: 2024–2027](#)). The evaluation plans are prepared for a four-year period at a time, and they cover all levels from early childhood education and care to higher education. The evaluation plan is drawn up and any modifications to it are made by the government-appointed Evaluation Council that operates in conjunction with FINEEC.

While the evaluation plan is drawn up for four years at a time, it can also be modified if this is necessitated by education policy reforms and other changes. Such modifications are approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture on the basis of the Council's proposal.

FINEEC always reviews the evaluation plan with the Ministry of Education and Culture at least once halfway through the planning period. In this review, completed evaluations and their findings are examined, and any changes to the plan are discussed.

Impact of inspections

FINEEC's evaluations provide an up-to-date picture of important themes in education, the level of competence, the impacts of education reforms and the state of quality management in education. The aim is to determine to what extent the results achieved meet the objectives that have been set. Our evaluation evidence helps improve Finnish education.

All our evaluation reports are public and can be downloaded from our website. To support the education providers, we give feedback to those who participated in the evaluations on their results in relation to the national level.

Quality assurance of inspections

FINEEC constantly develops its activities. The enhancement work is aimed at improving the customer-oriented approach and impact of FINEEC's evaluations and other activities as well as its internal activities.

To support this enhancement work, FINEEC systematically gathers feedback on the evaluations it has conducted and requests feedback from its stakeholders. Feedback is collected from both the organisations evaluated and the evaluation teams. Every year, FINEEC provides its stakeholders with a summary of the received feedback and the development measures based on it.

FINEEC regularly participates in the external evaluation of its activities. In 2023, the Ministry of Education and Culture implemented an international evaluation of FINEEC.

2. Evaluation process

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is one of the most important methods of enhancement-led evaluation at FINEEC. Self-evaluation supports institutions and other providers of education to identify the strengths, and especially to determine areas in need of development.

Examples:

- FINEEC evaluated in 2022 the quality management systems of vocational education and training providers. The purpose of the evaluation was to produce information on the status of VET providers' quality management systems and the implementation of the national quality strategy for vocational education and training (VET). The evaluation was based on self-evaluation reports from education providers, and the development seminars aimed at the participants.
- In the external evaluation of "Self-evaluation and quality management practices, employed by the providers of basic education and general upper secondary education" (2017), the main data was collected by the means of criteria-based self-evaluation of the providers – and completed with an enquiry.
- In ECEC, the objective of national evaluation is to promote the preconditions for children's well-being, development, and learning. Instead of measuring child outcomes, evaluations are directed to the pedagogical work of the professionals, and self-evaluation is thus greatly emphasised. The foci of the recent national ECEC evaluation was in the local processes related to the implementation of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC. The evaluation data was partially based in ECEC providers' self-evaluation of the curriculum processes.

Focus of inspection

Instead of external inspections of schools or education providers, the Finnish quality assurance system emphasises, for example, self-evaluation as well as learning outcomes and thematic evaluations. Until the early 1990s, quality assurance of Finnish education system was largely based on norms and inspections. Since then, school and textbook inspections were abolished.

Inspection framework

The aim of national evaluation is to produce information based on evaluation to promote the achievement of the objectives of the education system and to further improve education and ECEC.

The starting point in FINEEC's evaluations is a systemic view of the phenomena in education and ECEC, the interconnections between issues and the changing operating environment. Our multi-perspective evaluations tackle current topics to provide knowledge and understanding that strengthen the capacity of the education and ECEC system and the ability of organisations to change and adapt and help them to prepare for the future.

Our evaluations are based on the approach of enhancement-led evaluation, which has also been recorded in the legislation on evaluation of education. The starting point in enhancement-led evaluation is the need for evaluation and the usefulness of the evaluations

to the subject of the evaluation, the party commissioning the evaluation, the stakeholders participating in the evaluation and the users of the evaluation results.

[Enhancement-led evaluation](#) supports the achievement of the goals and promotes learning and change. Interaction, participation, an analysis of the operating environment and an understanding of the situation from the participants' point of view are essential in FINEEC's enhancement-led evaluation. The evaluation is aimed at achieving positive impact already during the evaluation and at using the evaluation results and the proposed recommendations to support change.

Inspection time and resources

The length of the evaluation is determined in the National Plan for Education Evaluations. Usually, our evaluations last few years depending on the subject and the type of evaluation. In addition to FINEEC's staff several external experts take part in our evaluations. The evaluation team usually consist of two or three of FINEEC's evaluation experts, a methodological expert, and external experts on the evaluated theme.

Frequency of inspections

The themes and schedules of FINEEC's evaluations are determined in the National Plan for Education Evaluations for a four-year period at a time. Different stakeholders across a broad front are consulted when preparing the evaluation plan, and themes for future evaluations may also be proposed by any of them. Factors accounted for when preparing the evaluation plan include building a national knowledge base for education, tapping information acquired previously and produced by other actors, and education themes topical for society.

The learning outcomes on mathematics and mother tongue (Finnish or Swedish) are evaluated frequently, the other subjects usually at least once in the duration of the national core curricula.

Non-inspection activities

It is also possible to order evaluation services subject to a fee from us, such as different lectures, training and commissioned evaluations on specific themes. Evaluation services subject to a fee can also be provided for international customers.

In addition to carrying out evaluations, FINEEC's task is to support education and training and early childhood education and care providers in matters related to evaluation and quality management. We support education and training providers in developing quality management by, for example, producing information on good quality management and development practices, supporting the utilisation of evaluation data, producing support materials, and providing training and guidance on quality management and evaluation.

3. Consequences of inspection

Reporting

All our evaluation reports are public and can be downloaded from our website. FINEEC will also provide the evaluation results and feedback to those who participated in the evaluation.

The results of an individual school are not published and in the reports we don't tell which schools took part in the evaluation.

The outcomes of the evaluation are usually published in webinars or seminars that are open to all.

Grading

The schools or education providers that are part of the evaluation are not graded. To help their quality management and development FINEEC gives feedback to all those who have participated in the evaluation.

Grading is used only in the audits of higher education institutes. The focus of the audit is on the procedures used by the HEI to maintain and enhance the quality of its activities, which is assessed in four evaluation areas. The outcome of each audit is decided by the Higher Education Evaluation Committee, members of which are representatives of universities and universities of applied sciences, students and working life.

Sharing inspection findings

The findings of the evaluation are shared through the evaluation reports or other publications, and they are also shared in our webpages. FINEEC discusses the outcomes with the Ministry of Education and Culture and with the Finnish National Agency for Education to support the development of the Finnish education system. We also share our findings in seminars and other events. FINEEC's experts also provide consultations and give presentations on our evaluation themes at other organisations' events.

What happens following an inspection?

In Finland, we have information based steering, and the objectives of evaluation are:

- 1) to produce knowledge for national education policy, for decision making and development at local level.
- 2) to support students' learning, school personnel's work, development of schools
- 3) to improve preconditions of learning also at local level

Example: In learning outcomes evaluations of basic education, schools and providers receive their own results compared with the national results and can use them on their development work. The school-wise results are not published nationally.

Early Childhood Education and Care Act 1973, Basic Education Act and General Upper Secondary Education Act 1998 state that education providers have a duty to evaluate the education they provide, to participate in external evaluations and to publish their results.

In every evaluation FINEEC produces developmental recommendations for the schools and to the national political decision-making.