



Centre for Education Systems

INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE REVIEW

ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

Summary of country report (3 pages)

Authors: AI generated with human checking
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Finland

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner consisting of several overlapping, curved segments in shades of dark blue, light blue, and light green, resembling a stylized arc or a partial circle.

Authorship. This AI generated summary has been created and checked by the CES team (see ces.partners/resources/methodologies). It is based on the original Country Reports created by EPPI. The author of the full report has not made final checks for accuracy.



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Finland – AI generated Accountability Policy summary

RQ1: Purposes, Values and Aims

The accountability system's primary goal is continuous improvement and support, focused on producing information for educational decision-making. The stated aims are aligned with the strategic goals in the National Education Evaluation Plan 2024–2027, which include raising competence and education levels, fostering social, ecological, and economic sustainable development, and continuously improving quality. The system is built on the core values of equity, inclusivity, and holistic student development. Inclusion and accessibility are prioritised through the evaluation focuses on "equal opportunities in education" and student welfare services. Accountability in vocational education is explicitly linked to competence-based education and progression based on demonstrated competence. Policy priorities maintain a focus on development-oriented evaluations and inclusive practices.

RQ 2 – Levels, measures, and mechanisms of accountability

Accountability in Finland is distributed across teachers, schools, municipalities, and national institutions, grounded in a professional model that prioritises trust, self-evaluation, and enhancement-led practices. Policy documents describe a decentralised system where teachers use continuous assessment integrated into daily work to monitor student progress against the national core curriculum (NCC).

While vertical oversight exists via municipalities and national assessments, it is intended to be enhancement-led rather than punitive, explicitly avoiding high-stakes inspections or ranking schools. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is central to the accountability structure, conducting enhancement-led evaluations focused on three main areas of quality assurance: Learning Outcomes Evaluations, Quality Management Evaluations, and Thematic Evaluations.

Monitoring includes school inputs, such as compliance with statutory norms and quality management systems; instructional and organisational processes, examining teaching methods, school climate, and pedagogical leadership; and school outputs, focusing on student achievement and long-term impacts like graduation rates. Learning outcomes evaluations assess achievement against the NCC objectives, often tracking longitudinal trends and equity factors.

Mechanisms link accountability to continuous improvement, starting with the NCC serving as the national standard. FINEEC provides feedback through aggregated reports, ensuring results are publicly accessible at the national level but not at the individual school level,

thereby preventing league tables and maintaining trust. Capacity building and support are crucial, facilitated through workshops and resources from FINEEC and the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) to help local providers adapt the curriculum and enhance self-evaluation. Furthermore, good practices are mapped and shared through collaboration networks to ensure system-wide consistency. Stakeholder engagement, particularly parental involvement, is largely mediated by municipal governments and implicit trust in the system's effectiveness. This cooperative framework focuses on continuous improvement rather than penalties or competition.

RQ 3 – Managing change and policy processes

The independent expert organisation FINEEC manages accountability policy changes, with the Ministry of Education and Culture approving its four-year evaluation plans. Governance involves a director and an expert Evaluation Council appointed by the Government. Policy changes utilise extensive consultations with stakeholders, including teachers, unions, and local authorities. Reforms are often approached piecemeal, focusing on specific curriculum updates like the recent LOPS 2019 reform, which introduced modular studies and broad competencies. In contrast, the 2018 vocational reform came into effect in January 2018. It was implemented nationwide without piloting, criticised as a "big bang" approach that caused implementation difficulties and increased teacher workload.

RQ 4 – Assessments of effectiveness and evaluation

Assessments are conducted regularly by FINEEC and the National Audit Office of Finland (NAOF), ensuring both external and independent oversight. FINEEC employs an enhancement-led approach, focusing on supporting educational development rather than ranking or punishing schools. Success metrics are indirect, based on maintaining high trust, longitudinal tracking of student competence, and evaluating quality management systems. Unintended consequences on teacher motivation and agency are monitored via internal evaluation and continuous monitoring. Evaluation findings directly inform policy design; for example, FINEEC's reports on pedagogical challenges have led to recommendations for reforming teacher education and professional development.

RQ 5 – Historical, cultural, and political influences

Finland's system is rooted in its political history, emphasising decentralisation and municipal autonomy following the comprehensive school reform of the 1970s. Societal values strongly endorse equity, inclusion, and mutual respect, sustaining a collective mission for quality education. Despite global pressures (Global Education Reform Movement), Finland resisted high-stakes testing, retaining sample-based, low-stakes evaluation to avoid competition and segregation. This resistance is rooted in professional trust and an enhancement-led institutional culture. Legal instruments require local evaluation for continuous improvement. The governance model favours broad-based collaboration, including the Teachers' Union, reflecting a collective commitment to professional support.

RQ 6 – Impact on outcomes and workforce

Research indicates that Finland, despite the absence of external high-stakes assessment at the end of basic secondary education, consistently ranks among high-performing jurisdictions in international comparisons. However, analysis of school governance tools, inspired by the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), shows no systematic positive effect on improving educational outcomes or minimising performance gaps linked to family background. Instead, the effects of student and school socioeconomic status (ESCS) explain nearly all variance in PISA science scores. Furthermore, increased school autonomy linked to decentralisation reforms has led to processes of selection and segregation in urban areas by socioeconomic background and ability, suggesting Finland has "significantly lost in equity".

Regarding the workforce, teachers generally experience a low administrative burden from routine accountability measures. Nevertheless, the KIKY policy (Competitiveness Pact), which mandated 24 additional unpaid working hours, was criticised by teachers for undermining their intrinsic motivation and introducing bureaucratic oversight inconsistent with the system's trust-based culture. This measure reportedly led to dissatisfaction and consideration of leaving the profession. Teachers strongly believe that the rigour of the selection and training process at the entry point and **pre-service teacher training** are the most influential policy factors supporting teaching quality, thereby reducing the perceived necessity for ongoing formal accountability. Critically, while the professional trust model is valued, teachers noted that the lack of structured feedback and follow-up in appraisal discussions hinders continuous improvement in practice. Additionally, nearly half of the surveyed teachers reported that teacher appraisal and feedback had minimal impact on their classroom teaching.

Timeline- recent accountability reforms

- **Early 1990s:** Decentralisation Reforms. Rationale: Shift from control to local responsibility. Key Features: Abolition of inspections; increased municipal/teacher autonomy.
- **2014:** Establishment of FINEEC. Rationale: Formalise enhancement-led evaluation. Key Features: Independent centre established for development-oriented evaluations.
- **2018:** Vocational Education Reform. Rationale: Economic sustainability. Key Features: Competence-based learning; Personal Competence Development Plan (PCDP/HOKS).
- **2021 (Aug):** LOPS 2019 Curriculum Reform. Rationale: Modernise upper secondary education. Key Features: Modular study structures and broad-based competencies.