

SUMMARY

In early 2013, a total of 3,476 pupils from 109 schools participated in an assessment of learning outcomes for the long syllabus in the English language. The sample represented approximately six per cent of the age group and consisted of 1,697 girls and 1,766 boys. Gender was not stated by 13 pupils. Of the pupils, 2,966 attended school in Finnish and 510 in Swedish. The majority offered Finnish as their mother tongue (83 per cent), followed by Swedish (13 per cent).

The pupils' English language proficiency was assessed by means of listening and reading comprehension and writing assignments. A number of pupils (1,500) were also assessed in spoken language. In all language skills, pupils achieved good, even excellent results. They managed best in spoken and written language, followed by listening and reading comprehension.

In productive skills (spoken and written language), the level of **good** performance, A2.2 - corresponding grade 8 on the scale of 4–10 - was attained by 77 per cent of pupils in speaking and by 72 per cent in writing. In receptive skills (listening and reading comprehension), the level of good performance, B1.1 was attained by 67 per cent of the pupils in listening and 62 per cent in reading comprehension. The level of **excellent** performance (no lower than B1.2) was achieved by 44 per cent of pupils in reading and 22 per cent of pupils in listening comprehension. In language production, the level of excellent performance (no lower than B1.1) was attained by 64 per cent of pupils in spoken language and 58 per cent of pupils in written language assessment.

In language comprehension, 17 per cent of pupils attained the level of **satisfactory** performance (A2.2) in both listening and reading. In language production, the level of satisfactory performance (A2.1) was attained by nine per cent of pupils in speaking and 12 per cent of pupils in writing. The number of pupils with **poor** performance, deviating at least two levels from good performance, was highest (21 per cent) in reading comprehension. In other skills, a poor level of performance was shown by 16 per cent of pupils in listening comprehension and writing and 14 per cent in speaking.

The most common proficiency level in reading comprehension, speaking and writing was B1.2, corresponding to the level of fluent basic language proficiency according to the scale set out in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004). The most common proficiency level in listening comprehension was B1.1, corresponding to the basic level of independent language profi-

ciency. Language proficiency at levels B1.2 and B1.1 enables pupils to manage in various everyday communication situations.

The pupils' plans for further study constituted the strongest background factor affecting their performance: those who had applied for entry to general upper secondary schools consistently achieved higher results than their peers who were planning to enter vocational education and training. Of those who attained the level of good performance, the difference was 36 percentage points in reading comprehension, 31 percentage points in listening comprehension, 32 percentage points in writing assignments and 29 percentage points in spoken assignments. Differentiated by gender, boys who entered general upper secondary school achieved the best results, with good or excellent performance in all skills, whereas girls entering vocational education and training were the weakest performers.

Other factors influencing pupils' performance included an interest in the English language outside school (for example, listening to music, watching films and video clips, joining in online discussion forums) and the perceived usefulness of the English language. The parents' level of education and the language of instruction at school also contributed to explaining the level achieved: the highest performers across the skills clearly included more children both of whose parents had passed the matriculation examination compared to those whose parents had not. On average there were more pupils from Swedish-language schools among those who achieved a good performance level in comparison to the complete pupil data. In contrast, a clear connection could not be established between the frequency of practices used during English lessons that promote learning (such as ICT, self-assessment, recording of spoken exercises) and the language learning outcomes, and nor did regular home study affect the results to any significant degree.

The pupils expressed largely positive opinions on their own skills and the usefulness of the English language and English studies in general. Slightly over 50 per cent of pupils thought they had good skills in the English language and the majority (82 per cent) thought that the grade they had received in English corresponded to their performance. Two thirds of the pupils thought English was a fairly easy subject, and nine out of ten pupils considered English skills to be important in today's world, saying that English was not only necessary in everyday life (78 per cent) but also in working life (74 per cent) and in their future studies (72 per cent). However, the pupils expressed more neutral opinions on how enjoyable English was as a subject, and how interesting they found the exercises.

Regionally and by type of municipality, the results showed variation across all four skills. In receptive skills, pupils from Southern Finland were generally among the highest attainers, while pupils from Northern Finland were among the lowest. The number of pupils achieving a good level of performance was the highest in Southern Finland, followed by Western and Inland Finland, and South-Western Finland. In productive skills, pupils from Southern Finland and Western and Inland Finland were among the highest achievers, while pupils from Eastern Finland and Lapland were among the weakest. By type of municipality, the best results were achieved in urban municipalities, followed by densely populated and rural municipalities. The differences in the learning results between the various regions and municipality types were so high that they should be taken into careful consideration in order to promote educational equality.

The variation in pupil attainment was largely explained by differences between schools. In particular, a great deal of variation between schools was observed in speaking. Distinctions between schools explained the variation in learning outcomes to the following degrees: 24 per cent in speaking, 14 per cent in listening comprehension, 10 per cent in reading comprehension and 8 per cent in writing.

In the light of these results, the key development objectives for English language teaching at schools include a better range of working methods applied during lessons, increased use of ICT, as well as provision for supporting and improving the range of practices that promote self-regulated learning and self-assessment. Support should also be provided for pupils showing weak proficiency in the English language. Finally, consideration should be given as to whether the good level of performance should be increased to B1.1 in language production (speaking and writing), harmonising the level of good proficiency across the skill sets.