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Evaluation of the implementation of the Pupil and Student Welfare Act in pre-primary education, basic education and general upper secondary education

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The Pupil and Student Welfare Act (1287/2013) entered into force on 1 August 2014. The Act imposes the right of pupils in pre-primary education and basic education as well as students in general upper secondary education and upper secondary vocational education to pupil and student welfare. The Act also imposes the organisation of pupil and student welfare. The purpose of the Act is to 1) promote the health, well-being, studying capacity and involvement of pupils and students, 2) prevent the emergence of problems, 3) secure early support to those who need it, 4) promote the well-being, healthiness, safety and accessibility of the school and studying community and environment, communal activities and the cooperation between home and educational institution, 5) secure the equal availability and quality of welfare services needed by pupils and students and 6) strengthen the implementation and management of pupil and student welfare as a functional entity and multidisciplinary cooperation. (Pupil and Student Welfare Act 1287/2013; Government proposal 67/2013.)

When passing the Pupil and Student Welfare Act, Parliament required an evaluation of the implementation of the Act in question in its response (Parliamentary reply 218/2013). Parliament assigned the Ministry of Education and Culture to monitor the impact of the reform on the effectiveness and intensification of pupil and student welfare, the availability of services and the sufficiency of personnel around the country. The Ministry of Education and Culture, in turn, assigned the aforementioned task of evaluating the implementation of the Pupil and Student Welfare Act to the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) in November 2015.

FINEEC evaluated the implementation of the Pupil and Student Welfare Act during the spring and early summer of 2017. The evaluation was participated by 264 pupil and student welfare steering groups of teaching and education providers, 159 pre-primary education unit-specific pupil welfare groups, 459 basic education school-specific pupil welfare groups, 215 upper secondary school-specific student welfare groups, 5,199 fifth-graders from basic education, 7,882 eighth-graders from basic education, 8,038 students in their second year of upper secondary school and 15 representatives of authoritative parties and stakeholders. The evaluation of the authorities and

stakeholders was conducted with thematic interviews. Other evaluation materials were collected through electronic surveys. In addition to the aforementioned, material analyses were conducted on 34 pre-primary education, 91 basic education and 61 general upper secondary education curricular pupil and student welfare sections. The results and analyses of this evaluation report are based on the aforementioned materials. In the abstract, the results are presented through the purpose of the Act and the evaluation task.

At the time of the evaluation, in the spring of 2017, the Pupil and Student Welfare Act had only been in force for about 2.5 years. A number of aspects in pupil and student welfare have become more efficient or developed in a positive direction in a short time after the passing of the Act. For example, the Act harmonised the activities and concepts of pupil and student welfare and improved the continuum of said welfare from pre-primary education all the way to upper secondary education. In many areas, however, pupil and student welfare is still undergoing a reformation.

Promoting the health, well-being, studying capacity and involvement of pupils and students.

Promoting the physical and mental health, social well-being and studying capacity of pupils and students has primarily remained unchanged in pre-primary, basic and general upper secondary education after the passing of the Pupil and Student Welfare Act. Slightly more progress has taken place in pre-primary education compared to basic and general upper secondary education. The same is reflected in the studying capacity of pupils and students.

The involvement of pupils in communal pupil and student welfare has become the most efficient in basic education. The involvement of pupils and students still needs work in many areas. Their involvement in the pupil welfare groups of pre-primary education units and schools was very low. In upper secondary schools, the situation was slightly better. The opportunities of pupils and students to participate in the decision-making processes of various plans in schools and educational institutions were also very low. However, the Act was considered to have improved the influencing opportunities of pupils and students a great deal in matters concerning them. Basic education pupils and upper secondary school students felt that they have diverse opportunities of participating in the functions of their school, such as school theme days or activities of the student association. The opportunity to participate was considered important. However, the knowledge of pupils and students about pupil and student welfare and their influencing opportunities at schools and educational institutions was low.

Preventing the emergence of problems and securing early support for those who need it.

The shift of the focal point in pupil and student welfare to early intervention and preventive work was most successful in pre-primary education. The views of the steering groups on the shift were also positive. In upper secondary schools and especially basic education schools, however, the shift of the focal point is far behind the level of pre-primary education. In many areas, pupil and student welfare still consists of a problem-oriented mindset where fires are put out and corrective measures are executed, but there are also pre-primary education units, schools and educational institutions that have progressed much further in developing a preventive approach.

Concerns personally expressed by pupils and students are reacted to efficiently at all educational levels. The smaller the child or pupil, the more efficiently early intervention is implemented. Basic education pupils and upper secondary school students felt that their concerns are reacted to efficiently and that they receive the help they need fairly quickly. The pupils and students find that receiving help is easier than asking for help.

Promoting the well-being, healthiness, safety and accessibility of the school and studying community and environment, communal activities and the cooperation between home and educational institution The Act has made well-being in the school and studying community and environment and the development of learning environments only slightly more efficient. However, the respondents felt that the aforementioned themes were implemented well in schools and educational institutions. Basic education pupils and upper secondary school students felt that schools and educational institutions should invest more in promoting safety skills, comfort at school, physical and mental health and social well-being. Upper secondary school students also felt that the prevention of social exclusion and bullying and the promotion of a communal spirit were important targets of development.

Communal pupil and student welfare was best implemented in upper secondary schools and basic education schools, and most progress in terms of efficiency had occurred in pre-primary education. The shift of the focal point in pupil and student welfare from individual to communal welfare saw most progress in terms of efficiency in pre-primary education. The steering groups of pupil and student welfare also agreed that progress could be seen in efficiency. In basic education and upper secondary schools, however, the attitude was more critical. Pre-primary education units, schools and educational institutions have a different pace in the implementation and development of communal pupil and student welfare: some are quite advanced while others are only taking their first steps. The Pupil and Student Welfare Act has made the involvement of children, pupils and students more efficient in communal pupil and student welfare. The level of involvement from the pupil and student welfare personnel in the communal activities of schools and educational institutions varied. Curators and nurses were the most active in their involvement, whereas physicians were only minimally involved.

The pupil and student welfare cooperation between home and school became more efficient after the Act, especially in pre-primary and basic education. In pre-primary education, pupil welfare is always or nearly always (87.3% of responses) in cooperation with the child or their guardian. The necessary pupil and student welfare cooperation is also conducted with guardians in basic and general upper secondary education. The impact of the Act on making cooperation more efficient has been moderate. The progress of the involvement of guardians in communal pupil and student welfare has varied between educational levels. The implementation of the involvement of guardians was most successful in pre-primary education and least successful in general upper secondary education.

Securing the equal availability and quality of welfare services needed by pupils and students. The Pupil and Student Welfare Act has made the availability of psychologist's and curator services more efficient throughout educational levels. On the other hand, there are schools and educational institutions in which the availability of said services has decreased. The availability of pupil and

student welfare services is the highest in nurse services. The availability of psychologist's and physician's services is weakest or, in many areas, completely inadequate. Equal availability of pupil and student welfare services has, therefore, not been implemented. There are also challenges in the implementation of the time limit requirements set by the Pupil and Student Welfare Act and the principle of local services in pupil and student welfare services. Individual pupil and student welfare has become more efficient throughout educational levels. The data protection of pupils has clearly improved after the Act.

Strengthening the implementation and management of pupil and student welfare as a functional entity and multidisciplinary cooperation. The Pupil and Student Welfare Act has made the operating policies of pupil and student welfare more efficient throughout educational levels. There is, however, some variation between municipalities, schools and educational institutions. Many policies were functional before the Act, which is why the Act has a reduced impact on efficiency in some areas. The Act has made pupil and student welfare more systematic, clarified management, coordination and the obligations of various operators and structured student welfare, among other things. Overall, the Act has made pupil and student welfare more multidisciplinary. There are challenges in, for example, cross-administrative cooperation, transfer of information and pupil and student welfare registers. In addition, a number of the more far-reaching impacts of the Act, such as the reduced need for corrective measures, child protection and mental health services, are still waiting to be implemented.