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Evaluation of the implementation of the Pupil and Student Welfare Act in vocational education and training

Authors

Tarja Frisk, Risto Hietala, Johanna Kiesi

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 upper secondary school and basic 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 co-operation. (Pupil and Student Welfare Act 1287/2013; HE 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 (EV 218/2013 vp). 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 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.

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre evaluated the implementation of the Pupil and Student Welfare Act during the spring and early summer of 2017. The evaluation was participated by 102 education providers, 4,395 second-year students from vocational education and training and 15 representatives of authorities and stakeholders. The evaluation of the authorities and stakeholders was conducted with thematic interviews. Other evaluation materials were collected through electronic surveys. 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. In many areas, pupil and student welfare is still undergoing a reformation. However, a number of aspects have become more efficient or developed in a positive direction after the passing of the Act. 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.

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

Promoting the health, well-being and studying capacity of students has primarily remained unchanged after the law reform. The most development has been seen in the organisation of support services promoting studying and the promotion of the mental health of students. Promoting the health and well-being of students is primarily at a good level. Promoting the learning of students is at a fairly good level. The organisation of the support services promoting studying has been the most successful in this respect. At the same time, improving the rhythm of the studies has proved the least successful in this respect.

In terms of involvement, students selected the opportunity to be included in the decision-making process of shared issues the most important target for development. Half of the students have been given the opportunity to evaluate and develop the operations.

Students feel that health is promoted well. The promotion of mental health and safety skills was considered weaker than the promotion of other health-related matters. Students feel that the prevention of bullying is implemented moderately well but still selected it as the most important target for development in terms of safety in educational institutions.

Promoting the involvement of students and the opportunities of influencing co-operation with educational institutions have become more effective. They are also at a good level. According to education providers, hearing students in matters concerning them is implemented well.

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

The prevention of problems and the early identification of the need for support have primarily remained unchanged after the Act was passed. Education providers' functions related to preventing problems and establishing early support are at a good level. After a student expresses their concern for themselves or other students, the necessary action is taken without delay. Education providers cooperate with guardians in matters related to the student and the pupil and the student welfare services of education providers support the early identification of the need for support.

Students know who to turn to with their concerns and feel that the relevant parties react to their concerns fairly well. The ease of asking for help varies. The better the student knew who to turn to, the easier they felt it was to both ask and receive help. Men found it slightly easier to ask for help than other respondents. Those who feel comfortable in their educational institution found

it easier to ask for and find help than those who feel moderately comfortable or not comfortable at all. Students who feel comfortable in their educational institution were more likely to feel that their concerns are being reacted to and support is provided quickly than those who do not feel comfortable in their institution.

Promoting the well-being, healthiness, safety and accessibility of the studying community and environment, communal activities and the cooperation between home and educational institution

Overall, communal pupil and student welfare has become slightly more efficient. The legal principles of communal pupil and student welfare are implemented fairly well.

The involvement of students in communal pupil and student welfare has improved and is at a good level. The primary responsibility of the personnel of the educational institution on the well-being of the community is implemented well. Communal pupil and student welfare as cooperation between all operators is implemented well. The involvement of teachers in communal pupil and student welfare is at a good level. The involvement of other educational institution employees is moderate. The involvement of guardians in communal pupil and student welfare is at a fairly poor level.

Promoting well-being in the studying environment is at a fairly good level. Promoting the well-being, healthiness and safety of the educational institution is primarily at a good level. The prevention of accidents has proved the most successful in this regard, whereas the accessibility of facilities has been the least successful. Co-operation between home and educational institution is at a fairly good level.

The involvement of the pupil and student welfare personnel in communal welfare varies. The involvement of psychologists and curators in communal pupil and student welfare has become slightly more efficient. Curators take part in communal pupil and student welfare often, nurses fairly often, psychologists rarely and physicians almost never.

Students feel that they can be themselves in the educational institution, they feel safe, they have friends and they like their studies. They felt that the teachers supported the communal spirit. The teachers have fairly sufficient time to discuss with the students and are fairly interested in how the students are doing.

Securing the equal availability and quality of welfare services needed by pupils and students

Individual pupil and student welfare has partially become more efficient. The student's opportunity to influence the composition of the multidisciplinary group and asking for the student's consent for processing the issue in a multidisciplinary group of experts have become fairly efficient.

Individual pupil and student welfare is at a very good level. The following principles of individual pupil and student welfare are nearly always implemented:

- Pupil and student welfare is implemented in cooperation with the student and the wishes and opinions of the student are taken into consideration.
- The student has given their consent for having their guardians participate in the processing of the issue.
- The student has the opportunity to influence the composition of the multidisciplinary group of experts.

The functions of processing the issue of an individual student or group of students by case-specifically assembled, multidisciplinary group of experts have become moderately more efficient, but the current state is very good. The issues of an individual student or group of students are nearly always processed by a case-specifically assembled, multidisciplinary group of experts. The processing of the issue is nearly always based on the consent of the student or the guardian. The members of the group of experts are nearly always appointed upon the student's consent. Individual meetings are always put on record.

After the law reform, psychologist's services have become fairly efficient and curator services only somewhat efficient. The availability of nurse's services and curator services is good. The availability of psychologist's services and physician's services is moderate. The availability of pupil and student welfare services varies between the education provider's operating locations situated in different municipalities. The availability of psychologist's and physician's services between the education provider's operating locations situated in different municipalities varies the most.

The students felt that it was easy to receive help from the nurse's services and curator services. The students felt that it was fairly easy to receive help from the psychologist's and curator services. During work placements, the students found it slightly more difficult to receive pupil and student welfare services.

Overall, the legal rights (time limits) of students to receive pupil and student welfare services within the time limit were nearly always implemented. In terms of individual rights, the opportunity for a discussion on grounds of contact from the student's guardian, referring the student on grounds of a psychologist's or curator's assessments to other pupil and student welfare services and referring the student, if necessary, to other functions supporting the need for special support were always implemented. The student's rights are equally implemented in operating locations situated in the same municipality. The implementation of the student's rights varies between operating locations situated in different municipalities.

According to the education providers' evaluation groups, students in need of special support have special requirements for the availability of pupil and student welfare. Students whose first language is not Finnish or Swedish also have some special requirements.

The responsibilities of the home municipalities of the educational institution in pupil and student welfare services are nearly always implemented.

The sufficiency of pupil and student welfare personnel in terms of psychologists and curators has improved after the law reform. The current state of the sufficiency of personnel varies according to occupational group. The sufficiency of curators is moderate and that of nurses fairly good. The number of psychologists is fairly insufficient. The number of physicians is also fairly insufficient. The sufficiency of psychologists varies by area.

Strengthening the implementation and management of pupil and student welfare as a functional entity and multidisciplinary cooperation

The planning and implementation of pupil and student welfare has become more effective after the Act entered into force. The development of operating methods in pupil and student welfare, in particular, has become more efficient. Agreeing on the principles of the guardians' involvement has become slightly more efficient.

The current state of the planning and implementation of pupil and student welfare is primarily at a good level. The planning of organising individual pupil and student welfare and agreeing on the principles of multidisciplinary, professional cooperation are the most successful in terms of implementation. Agreeing on the principles of the guardians' involvement, developing the personnel's competence regarding pupil and student welfare and the monitoring and evaluation of said welfare (self-monitoring) were weaker than other functions in terms of implementation.

There are some differences between operating locations in the planning and implementation of pupil and student welfare.

Most education providers have statutory pupil and student welfare plans that guide the organisation of welfare.

Most education providers have legal pupil and student welfare groups and a pupil and student welfare steering group appointed for the education provider. There are some challenges in the flow of information between pupil and student welfare groups.

Cooperation across administrative borders has become slightly more efficient after the law reform. Overall, the cooperation functions well.

The preventive cooperation of pupil and student welfare has remained unchanged after the law reform. Overall, the cooperation is at a moderate level. The preventive cooperation with the youth sector functions well. The cooperation with parishes, social welfare and healthcare sector and other providers of vocational education and training also functions fairly well. The cooperation with basic education and upper secondary schools functions moderately. The cooperation with the police functions moderately.

The workload of nearly all occupational groups has increased after the law reform. The workload of teachers, curators and psychologists has increased the most. The workload of rectors, special needs teachers and guidance counsellors has also increased.

The statutory obligation of education providers to inform and organise guidance related to pupil and student welfare has become slightly more efficient. Overall, the implementation of the obligation to inform and organise guidance is at a good level. The best implementation was found in the following: students have been informed of the available pupil and student welfare services, personnel has been informed of said welfare services available to the students and the personnel of said welfare services were instructed how to refer a student to their needed welfare benefits and services. The providers faced challenges in agreeing on systematic methods for situations where the student does not respond to contacts from the pupil and student welfare services or refuses to meet them. The students' experiences on the sufficiency of informing vary. The most important information and guidance channels of pupil and student welfare for students were the teacher and the group leader. The experiences on the sufficiency of information differ according to the student's first language and their comfort in the educational institution.

Confidentiality and the transfer of information have remained unchanged after the law reform. The transfer of information between parties taking part in the pupil and student welfare is implemented moderately. Those taking part in pupil and student welfare nearly always receive from each other or disclose to each other the necessary information for organising said welfare. The functions related to the transfer of information have remained unchanged after the Act entered into force. Information is moderately transferred when leaving basic education and moving on to basic vocational education.

Impact of the Pupil and Student Welfare Act

Impact on authoritative activity

- The obligations of pupil and student welfare operators have been clarified and the activities have been structured more efficiently.
- The management of pupil and student welfare has been structured.
- The focal point of pupil and student welfare has not yet shifted from individual welfare to communal welfare or to early intervention and preventive work.
- The transfer of information between different fields of administration has not improved.
- Unnecessary obstacles have not been removed from authoritative cooperation related to pupil and student welfare.

Social impact

- Overall, pupil and student welfare has become more multidisciplinary.
- There has been some clarification of legislation and concepts of pupil and student welfare.
- Overall, pupil and student welfare has become more efficient.
- The need for students' mental health services, social services and child protection has not been reduced.

Impact on overall pupil and student welfare

- Pupil and student welfare has become more systematic.
- The data protection of students has improved.
- There has been some clarification of legislation and concepts of pupil and student welfare.
- The registers have not become more functional.

Impact on youth

- Young people's opportunities of influence have improved.
- The involvement of students in communal pupil and student welfare has improved.
- Cooperation related to pupil and student welfare has not increased between home and educational institution.
- Dropouts have not been reduced.
- Graduation has not improved.

Impact on the operations of the education provider

- Pupil and student welfare supports teachers' upbringing and teaching work.
- The curator and nurse are involved in communal pupil and student welfare.
- The corrective measures of pupil and student welfare have not been reduced.
- The physician is not involved in communal pupil and student welfare.

Impact on the availability and sufficiency of pupil and student welfare services

- Students receive pupil and student welfare services within the time limit set by the Act.
- The availability of pupil and student welfare services has improved.
- It is easier for students to receive help in pupil and student welfare.
- The quality of pupil and student welfare services has become more consistent.