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Competence in mathematics and mother tongue and literature at the start of third grade

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In Autumn 2020, FINEEC assessed the competence of third graders in mathematics and mother tongue and literature. The purpose of the assessment was to produce national data on pupils' skill levels after the second grade. The same pupils' skills were also assessed in first grade, and their competence will be assessed again in sixth and ninth grades.

This report details the preliminary results of the third grade assessment based on the pupil data. The nationwide sample of the assessment consisted of a total of 8,077 pupils from 274 schools. Of these pupils, 7,183 were Finnish-speaking and 989 were Swedish-speaking. 569 of the pupils were studying Finnish or Swedish as a second language. The participating pupils completed a series of exercises intended to measure their competence using computers or tablets.

The participating pupils' competence was consistent across different parts of the country. Differences in competence between the areas of Regional State Administrative Agencies were small. However, there were differences in the degree to which competence levels varied within regions. Competence levels were slightly higher in semi-urban municipalities than in urban and rural ones. The pupils' skills were equally good in Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking schools. In contrast, the competence levels of pupils studying Finnish or Swedish as a second language (L2) were notably lower than the rest. The numbers of pupils studying L2 were also reflected in regional results. The effect was most pronounced in Southern Finland and Southwestern Finland and in urban municipalities.

Differences in competence were high between individuals, but low between the sexes, with sex only accounting for half a per cent of the total score. Girls scored slightly higher than boys overall and were better at the mother tongue exercises than boys. In mathematics, girls and boys demonstrated equal levels of skill.

At the beginning of year 3, the differences between the schools were greater than at the start of school in year 1. However, differences between schools remained moderate compared to the international level.

Keywords: assessment, basic education, early primary education, evaluation, learning outcomes, literacy, mathematics, mother tongue and literature