

Religious and Alternative Events in Early Childhood and Basic Education

- Instruction for guardians

11/2002



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General



-The instructions follow the guidelines updated by Opetushallitus on 19th Sep 2022 and ensure the realization of the basic rights pertaining to educational and religious freedom in early childhood education and in basic education, advancing tolerance and pluralism, and ensure that the education does not religiously or with regards to beliefs attempt to bind the pupils.

-The organizers of the education are responsible for implementing the teaching, and for organizing religious events and ceremonies, and for alternative activities for those according to the manner regulations and stipulations demand.

- The school provides the kind of religious education that the majority of its pupil community belong to.

-The organizer of education is a duty to also teach orthodox religion or ethics, if there is at least three (3) pupils in total in the schools of the organizer of the education.

-Also, in other religions, there will be teaching provided if the minimum limit of three (3) pupils belonging to a religious community registered in Finland is reached, and a legal guardian requests for such teaching to be offered.

- Should a pupil not participate in an organized religious education, teaching offered by their own community, or in ethics classes, they have other supervised activities in school instead.



Religious Education



- Religious education is not practicing a religion. In addition to familiarization in religion, there is also becoming familiar with the forms and customs of practicing religion. Familiarization with prayers, psalms, and religious ceremonies or an educational visit related to the curriculum, in which one becomes familiar with a church, mosque, or corresponding religious building, or observing a religious ceremony without participating in it, is not a religious event, but part of the education (lessons). All education and other activity is to be pedagogically based.
- When it comes to choices pertaining to studies in religion and ethics, the principle is similar to other choices in education that the choice is considered to be a permanent one. Should the religious community of the pupil change, or the pupil does not belong to any religious community, the legal guardian of the pupil has a right to change their choice of study in religion and ethics.
- The goal is that any potential changes in studies are done at the end of the school year.
- The school can, when necessary, ask the legal guardian of a pupil to provide a reliable account of being a member of a religious community, or the education provided to a pupil and their cultural background to correspond to the religion to be taught. For this part, it is enough that the account is presented to the school. It is not archived.



Traditional Festivities



- The organizers of the education and schools decide upon festivities and their content, which are a part of education to the pupils and coordinated communal activity with their legal guardians.
- The festivities may include some elements referring to religion. These kinds of festival traditions are a part of Finnish culture. With regards to a potential psalm being sung as a part of the festivities or listening to such, the festivity cannot be regarded as, according to the religious tolerance principle, an event where religion is practiced.
- The pupils are supported when it comes to religious tolerance and pluralism in the school activities. These kinds of festivities, such as Christmas festivities, spring festivities, and independence day festivities cannot be religious events, nor are there alternatives organized for them.



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Religious Events in Basic Education (1/3)



- The organizers of the education or singular schools may decide whether or not they will be organizing religious events in conjunction with early childhood and basic education, such as service or religious school assemblies. The events and activities are organized separated from other activities.
- The school has no duty to organize religious events.
- The school should notify homes in time about cooperation conducted with congregations, their contents, and the practical implementation.
- Religious events are practicing religion, thus the legal guardians have by default a right to choose whether or not a pupil participates in the event or not.
- No one is duty bound to participate in practicing religion against their will. Accordingly, a pupil may not be demanded to participate in service, religious school assemblies, or in other religious events or ceremonies.



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Religious Events in Basic Education (2/3)



- Freedom to not participate in a religious event and ceremony is independent of a membership of a religious community. Thus, even members of a particular religious community cannot be made to participate in religious events and ceremonies organized by that particular religious community or in ones organized by the organizers of the education.
- A pupil participating or not participating is to not cause them to become stigmatized or having their equal treatment becoming endangered.
- Should a school organize a religious event or ceremony, they have to organize an alternative activity for the same time according to the curriculum if possible. The alternative activity is to be purposeful and with the exception of religious content, be as close to the nature and goals of the religious event as possible.
- Religious events and ceremonies have to be organized separate from other activities, or they are to be named in a manner which gives the pupils and their legal guardians the right understanding of the religious nature of the event or ceremony.



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Religious Events in Basic Education (3/3)



- Should the school day contain religious events and ceremonies, and alternative activities for them, one should ensure that the equal treatment of pupils is not endangered, nor there be a stigmatization especially if the events are planned to be organized in religious spaces, such as in seurakuntakoti .
- The school is responsible for the safety of every pupil participating in various activities.



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The Legal Guardians Notice of Pupils Participation in Religious Events



- At the start of a school year, the school informs of each religious event. The legal guardian of the pupil can, in a non-recurring manner, notify whether or not the pupil will be participating in religious events and ceremonies, or in an alternative activity.
- The school ensures that the pupil's participation in religious events or ceremonies, or in an alternative activity instead is realized according to the notice by the legal guardian.
- According to the Basic Education Act, the education is to be in collaboration with the homes. The start of collaboration is building trust, equality, and mutual respect. In collaboration, the diverse nature of families is acknowledged.



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Based on National guidance by Opetushallitus



The city of Oulu's guidance on religious and alternative events is based on the guidance by Opetushallitus

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