

GUIDE FOR IMMIGRANT AND OTHER FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS

IISALMEN LYSEO



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1. NATIONAL CORE CURRICULUM FOR UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The tasks, basic values, conception of learning, study environments and methods, operational culture as well as the structure of studies were defined in the National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools in 2003. The local curricula based on the new core curriculum came into effect in 2005.

http://www.oph.fi/english/education/general_upper_secondary_education/curriculum

Role of general upper secondary education

General upper secondary education continues the teaching and educational tasks of basic education. The role of upper secondary education is to provide extensive all-round learning. It provides sufficient capabilities for further studies based on the general upper secondary school syllabus. The skills and knowledge obtained at upper secondary school will be indicated on the upper secondary school leaving certificate, the Matriculation Examination certificate, school diplomas and other equivalent documentation.

General upper secondary education provides students with capabilities to meet the challenges presented by society and their environment and with the ability to assess matters from different perspectives. Students are guided to act as responsible and dutiful citizens in society and future working life. Upper secondary school instruction supports the development of students' self-awareness and their positive growth towards adulthood and encourages students towards lifelong learning and continuous self-development.

Basic values

The basic values of upper secondary school instruction are built on Finnish cultural history, which is part of Nordic and European cultural heritage. Upper secondary school students should learn how to treasure, assess and renew their cultural heritage. Students will be educated in tolerance and international co-operation.

Upper secondary school instruction is based on respect for life and human rights. The educational ideal comprises the pursuit for truth, humaneness and justice. General upper secondary education promotes open democracy, equality and well-being.

Educational work will place emphasis on co-operation, encouraging interaction and honesty. The aim is for students to know their rights and responsibilities and to grow to assume adult responsibility for their own choices and actions. Students are provided with experiences of how to shape the future through joint decisions and efforts. Upper secondary school instruction encourages students to recognise conflicts between stated values and reality and to ponder critically the disadvantages and opportunities of Finnish society and international development. During their studies, students become able to form a structured understanding of basic civil rights in Finland, the Nordic countries and the European Union, their meaning in practical terms and ways to uphold and promote them. Upper secondary school highlights the principles of sustainable development and provides capabilities to face the challenges posed by the changing world.

Study environments and methods

The conception of learning that emphasizes students' own active knowledge construction process calls for upper secondary schools to create study environments which will enable students to set their own objectives and learn to work independently and collaboratively in different groups and networks. Students are given opportunities to test and find working methods suitable for their own learning style. They are guided to become conscious of, assess and, where necessary, correct their own methods. Due to students' individuality and heterogeneity, the forms of teaching and learning are diversified.

Instruction in upper secondary schools takes into account the fact that despite the general common principles of learning, individuals' ability to learn depends on their previous knowledge and the learning strategies they apply. Learning is tied to the activities, situation and culture where it takes place. The knowledge or skill gained in one particular situation cannot necessarily be transferred to another situation.

Operational culture

The operational culture of an upper secondary school is a practical interpretation of the school's teaching and educational tasks. The operational culture embraces all the upper secondary school's written and unwritten rules, operational and behavioral models, as well as the values, principles and criteria which form the basis of the quality of schoolwork. The operational culture manifests itself on individual, group and community levels.

The aim is to use the curriculum as the basis to create an operational culture that highlights the responsibility of the members of the community as a whole and is open to co-operation and interaction with society and to changes occurring in the world. Students are provided with opportunities to participate in the development of their own working community through means such as student union activities.

Structure of studies

Upper secondary school studies take three years though it is possible to complete them in two or four years as well. The studies consist of compulsory, specialisation and applied courses. Specialisation courses are elective courses relating to compulsory courses in the same subject and students are required to include at least ten such courses as part of their study plan. The minimum requirement as regards the total number of courses is 75.

In addition to the minimum number of specialisation courses, each upper secondary school may provide school-specific specialisation courses to be specified within the upper secondary school's curriculum. Applied courses are integrative courses including elements from various subjects, methodological courses, vocational studies organized by the same or another educational provider or other studies suitable for the role of upper secondary school. Applied courses may also include courses taken as part of the general upper secondary school diplomas completed in art and physical education. The general upper secondary school diplomas will be completed in accordance with instructions from the Finnish National Board of Education. The order of completion of the courses is detailed within the upper secondary school's curriculum.

Immigrant and other foreign language students

Instruction and studies for immigrant and other foreign students will comply with the National Core Curriculum and the local upper secondary school curriculum, with due consideration given to the backgrounds and previous knowledge of students, such as Finnish language skills.

Instead of mother tongue and literature instruction determined according to the school's language of instruction, immigrants and other foreign students may be taught Finnish as a second language if their Finnish skills do not match those of a native speaker. Where possible, immigrant and other foreign-language students may also be provided with instruction in their respective native languages in co-operation with other educational institutions. In addition, immigrant and other foreign students are provided with other types of support, so as to enable them to succeed in their studies.

2. APPLYING TO UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL AND ACCEPTING A STUDY PLACE

Application takes place on the internet through the national joint application system from the beginning of February to the end of March each year (www.haenyt.fi).

The selection results will be published in June. Those, who have not been selected, can reapply through the national joint application system in summer if there are study places available.

Iisalmen Upper Secondary School (Iisalmen lyseo) will send the selected applicants a letter of acceptance to their home address. The names of the selected students will also be displayed on the school notice board and published in the local newspaper.

Those selected must accept a study place by the end of June by sending or handing in a completed form of acceptance, which they receive attached to the letter of acceptance.

3. IISALMEN LYSEO (IISALMI UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL)

Iisalmen Upper Secondary School provides general upper secondary education of a high standard. The school offers a wide range of courses in various subjects, and students can specialise, for example, in languages, mathematics and natural sciences, history, psychology, art or physical education.

Studying in upper secondary school is more theoretical and academic than in basic education. Having a responsible attitude towards the studies and willingness to do all the given tasks will help the students to succeed. Teaching methods vary from teacher oriented to independent and group work. The volume of assignments and independent work will be greater than in basic education.

Teachers in Iisalmi Upper Secondary School have a university master's degree and they are experts in their own field. They encourage and support the students as well as guide them to independent thinking, consciousness, punctuality, honesty and good manners. The relationship between teachers and students is friendly and straightforward. Even though they are on first-name terms, they share mutual respect.



Entrance requirement

The selection of new students is based on the average grade of academic subjects in their comprehensive school leaving certificate. According to the Educational Board of Iisalmi Council, the minimum requirement is 7,0 average in theoretical subjects. These include Finnish language and literature, the second national language (Swedish), foreign languages, religious or ethical studies, history and social studies, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography and health education.

Terms and holidays

The school year is divided into six periods each of which is five to six weeks long. The maximum number of courses per period is six. Each period ends in an exam week after which the students' performance in the courses is assessed by the teachers.

The autumn term begins in the middle of August and ends prior to Christmas. The spring term starts at the beginning of January after a one-or two-week holiday and it ends at the end of May/the beginning of June. Autumn holiday is on week 42 and spring holiday is on week 10.

Syllabus

National compulsory and specialisation courses are offered every year. Students can also choose school specific specialisation and applied courses. These ensure that the students gain the necessary knowledge and skills needed in the national Matriculation Examination and in their future studies. The courses can be viewed on the school web page. (<http://www.iisalmi.fi/Suomeksi/Koulutus/Lukiokoulutus/Lyseo>)

Wilma and school web page

Wilma is a web interface integrated in the school management programme (<https://wilma.iisalmi.fi>). It allows students to register for courses, to check their timetable and grades, to read bulletins, to communicate with teachers and answer school surveys. Parents can also use Wilma to monitor their child's progress and attendance, to send messages to teachers and to read school bulletins.

All important information concerning studies and the Matriculation Examination can be viewed on the school web page (<http://iisalmi.fi/lyseo>). There is also a link to the school news letter Linkki.

Distant learning and adult upper secondary school

Students can study various courses on the internet via ISOVerstas learning service which covers all upper secondary schools in eastern Finland. Studying in ISOVerstas is recommended especially when a certain course is not available in the school syllabus. (www.isoverstas.fi)

All the courses offered by the Adult Upper Secondary School of Iisalmi are available to the students.

(www.iisalmi.fi/aikuislukio)

MAHIS-study programme

MAHIS is a cooperative educational network between the upper secondary schools of Iisalmi, Kiuruvesi, Pielavesi, Sonkajärvi and Vieremä and vocational schools. It enables students to complete upper secondary school and vocational education simultaneously in four years. It also enables upper secondary school students to study certain courses of their choice in vocational school. Further information is available on the home page of MAHIS (www.mahis.fi)

Sports Academy

Students studying in Iisalmi Upper Secondary School can attend Sports Academy if they participate in sports training and they are fully committed to it. They also need to receive their coach's agreement and the careers advisor's recommendation. In addition, the students have to agree not to smoke and not to use alcohol or narcotics.

Training is in accordance with the school syllabus and it takes place from eight till ten every Tuesday and Thursday. A year's attendance in Sports Academy is equivalent to four courses. The school is flexible as regards students attending training camps and competitions.

Sports Academy, however, restricts the choice of other courses as it requires four lessons a week. For example, students attending MAHIS-programme cannot take part in Sports Academy during the periods they are studying in vocational school. Application period to Sports Academy is from the beginning of February to the end of March.

Cultural Academy

Cultural Academy is aimed at the students who wish to acquire further instruction in arts. The goal is to increase opportunities to study arts both in comprehensive and in upper secondary school. The students are offered study units, in which they can combine various art forms: music, art, drama and dance. The Academy aims at carrying out an artistic production, such as a musical, at regular intervals.



The selection of students is based on an entrance exam and references. Students' previous studies and experience are also taken into account. Students are selected for one school year at a time. Application forms are available in the career advisor's office and on the Cultural Academy web page.

International education

International and global education is part of the national and local curriculum, and themes related to it are covered in many subjects. Iisalmi Upper Secondary School also offers two or three intercultural courses annually and there have been many international projects with various European schools. The school also hosts exchange students from different parts of the world. International co-operation is coordinated by a group of teachers who work within a team called Cultura.



Matriculation Examination



The Matriculation Examination is completed by the end of upper secondary school studies. The tests required in the examination are held biannually, in spring and in autumn, on the dates set by the Matriculation Examination Board. A candidate must complete the examination during not more than three consecutive examination periods. The examination can also be completed in one examination period, except when a candidate takes a test in two foreign languages of advanced level.

The examination consists of at least four tests and one of them, the test in the candidate's mother tongue, is compulsory for all candidates. The candidate then chooses three other compulsory tests from the following four tests: the second national language, a foreign language, mathematics and one general studies subject (sciences and humanities).

As part of the examination, the candidate may additionally include one or more optional tests. A candidate, whose mother tongue is not Finnish, can replace the mother tongue test with the Finnish second language test.

The tests are arranged at two different levels of difficulty in mathematics, the second national language and foreign languages. The candidate must, however, take at least one test of advanced level in these subjects. A candidate who has passed a test may retake it once. A candidate, who has failed a compulsory test, may retake the test twice during the three examination periods immediately following the examination period in which the test was failed. A failed optional test may be retaken twice without a time limit.

Costs and subsidies

Studying in upper secondary school is free. Students also receive free school meals and health care but they pay for textbooks and other materials.

Bus fares are subsidized by Kela if the distance from home to school is at least ten kilometres. The maximum distance subsidized is one hundred kilometres. In addition, it is assumed that the expenses exceed 54 euros a month and students themselves are expected to pay 43 euros a month for travelling expenses. (Further details in www.kela.fi)

Student accommodation is available from Kiinteistö Oy Petterinkulma. Applications can be submitted at any time. (Further information: tel. 020 743 9126 or www.petterinkulma.fi)

Students, who are 17 years of age or older, may be entitled to a student allowance. Further details about the terms and conditions are available at Kela.

4. STUDYING IN IISALMI UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

School days and timetable

Students follow their own personal timetable, which is different in each period. The first lesson may start at 8 and the last lesson finishes at 15.00 the latest, except on Fridays when the school day ends at 13.40. The breaks between lessons are 10-15 minutes long.

Students resort to the so called "course tray" in the school syllabus when they mark the lessons of their courses on their timetable.

School meals

Students can have their school lunch either at 10.35-11.15 or 11.50-12.30 depending on their timetable. Special diets are also catered for.

Homework

Students receive homework in almost every subject. This includes studying and completing exercises. Doing homework is an essential part of upper secondary school studies and it affects the assessment of each course. Homework will also include assignments, such as a study or an essay, which require a longer time span to complete.

Tests and exam week

Most courses end in a final test which is taken during the exam week. Tests begin at 8.30 and end at 12.30 the latest. If a student is ill on an exam day, he must hand in a written explanation as to why he was absent. Students purchase the note paper used in tests themselves.

Assessment

The performance of each student is assessed after the exam week. The purpose of assessment is to give students feedback as to how they have managed to reach the objectives of the course and how they are progressing in their studies. The scale of evaluation is from 4 to 10. Grade 10 indicates excellent performance and grade 4 a failure. Some courses are, however, assessed by giving a grade Passed or Failed.

Completing a course independently

Students have the opportunity to study some of the courses independently. They have to complete all the tasks given by the teacher and take part in the final test of the course. The amount of work is equivalent to the work completed in the course.

School leaving and other certificates

All subjects are assessed by grades 4 -10, except physical education and the ones in which a student has completed only one course. The grade given in these courses is Passed or Failed. A student can, however, have a grade 4-10 in these courses as well if he so desires. The optional foreign languages are also given grades if the required number of courses is at least three.

The final grade of each subject in the school leaving certificate is determined by the average grade achieved in the completed compulsory and national specialisation courses.

If a student shows better performance than his grade requires in the oral examination taken prior to the Matriculation Examination, he can receive a better grade than his average indicates. The school specific specialisation and applied courses can also affect the grade in any subject.

Students will also receive other school diplomas and certificates for completing certain courses and a separate Matriculation Examination certificate.

5. PRACTICES AND RULES

Working day

Students are required to arrive in lessons on time. Reasons for being late or being absent must be presented in written form to the teachers as soon as possible. All the absences must be explained prior to the exam week. Students under 18 years of age must ask for their parent's signature in the note explaining the reason for being absent.

All students as well as teachers are entitled to a peaceful working environment. Mobile phones and other electronic devices must be kept turned off during lessons and tests.

Students are expected to follow the rules of good conduct by being polite and taking others into consideration.

Smoking and using intoxicating substances

The use of or carrying intoxicating substances, such as alcohol, narcotics or other drugs, is not allowed at school or in the events organized by the school. Smoking and the use of snuff are also forbidden at school and on the school grounds.

6. STUDENT CARE IN IISALMI UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Form teacher

Each student is placed in a group, which meets its form teacher once a week. The form teacher informs about the school practices, follows the students' progress and absences, contacts the parents when necessary, guides the students in their studies and grants permission to be absent for up to three days. Form teachers usually teach their group the first three courses in their own subject.

Careers advisor

Student counselling assists students to plan and carry out their study programme. In addition, the careers advisor informs the students about upper secondary school and further studies and gives the students personal guidance concerning studies and the choice of their future career. She also assists students, who have learning difficulties or personal issues of concern, in seeking help and support.

The careers advisor also leads the student support group, which in addition to her, comprises the principal, special education teacher, school nurse, student welfare officer, one teacher and when needed, the school psychologist.

School nurse and doctor

School nurse is available three days a week. She carries out health check-ups and informs the students about health services. Students can always turn to the school nurse if they become ill during the school day. She also makes doctor's appointments for the students.

Special education teacher and remedial teaching

The aim of special education is to support students in their learning difficulties. The special education teacher works in Iisalmi Upper Secondary School several hours a week during the whole school year.

Language difficulties can be apparent in reading speed and comprehension as well as in writing. All first year students complete a reading test. If a need arises, students receive further assessment and aid.

The school also offers students the opportunity to obtain extra tuition if they face difficulties in a certain subject. This remedial teaching is given by the subject teachers and it is free to the students.

Welfare officer and psychologist

Students can consult the welfare officer or the school psychologist in matters that concern them. These may be, for example, issues relating to their emotional life, relationships, studies or changes in life circumstances. The aim is to evaluate the student's situation, give support and understanding as well search for new alternatives. The welfare officer's and the psychologist's services are completely confidential and free of charge. Their services are shared by several schools in the area.