

Veikkola School, Southern Finland



We visited Veikkola School following a very windy uphill route through the outskirts of Helsinki. It was easy to forget that this rural area was so close to a city given its pastoral setting. The school is situated on the edge of a forest which can be openly accessed from the school. Yellow marks on some trees denote the point pupils are not meant to go past.

The school is an all through one and is oversubscribed from the surrounding community. Grades 7–10 (Years 9 – 11) are the biggest as pupils transfer in from other schools in the locality.

The school leader gave us an introduction to the school, which has been involved in a number of Erasmus projects looking at both global environmental issues and the developing use of Technology. He clearly articulated his vision of teaching pupils to be “problem designers” and the ongoing challenge of teaching them to learn about a future we do not know about yet, and with technologies and global challenges which will provide a very different context to the one they are living in now. This ethos and challenge drives the school forward and pupils are encouraged to be independent thinkers and develop resilience in solving problems before seeking help from adults to do so.

This was very evident in the robotics class we saw, where pupils were programming their vehicles to follow a specific path. In a number of cases pupils were learning from the success and failures of other pupils in the class and were very focused on finding their own solutions without teacher support. Resilience and persistence was evident throughout.

We then had a school dinner consisting of porridge with a berry compote, crispbreads and cold meat. All pupils and staff have the same hot dinner at lunchtime. One pupil told us they were very fortunate to have this hot meal every day and that her parents paid their taxes so she was able to do so.

The school has a very clear policy for the use of TECHNOLOGY and see it as a means to learning in specific circumstances rather than the medium of learning throughout. Our pupil

guides said they used paper and pencil to record notes etc. in lessons as getting laptops etc. and making sure they were always charged could waste a lot of time.

Where technology is used however it is used very effectively. Grades 9 and 10 were making and designing their own clothes, making hoodies from scratch and also designing ball gowns for their upcoming 100 year independence celebrations. Skills to achieve this are built up gradually through the year groups and pupils are always clear what successful outcomes look like.

In a resistant materials lesson pupils were using equipment freely and independently using some creative methods to overcome problems, for example, a pupil standing on the table on a very long plank of wood to secure it for another pupil sawing it!

What I have taken away from this school, apart from an envy of the high quality of equipment, is that guidance and freedom to learn though mistakes, needs to be given time. We are far too often focused on immediate outcomes rather than allowing pupils to make mistakes and restart to achieve better overall outcomes over time.

