

Espoo International School Board

Statement Request - draft 3
Date: 4th December, 2023

Subject

Espoo City Statement Request from Jemina Sirviö and Sariminna Solala regarding proposed changes to pupil admission criteria for English-language provision in the City of Espoo (dated 21st November, 2023).

Initial remarks

This is only a draft by the EIS School Board (hereinafter "the Board") based on an extraordinary Board meeting held on 28th November, 2023. A fuller, official statement can be issued once the Board has had the opportunity to get clarifications from the City of Espoo (hereinafter "Espoo City") on many issues, and gather input from other stakeholders.

The Board would like to thank Espoo City for their work so far on this important issue.

Given the very short timescale to gather comments and form a position on this complex, important issue, the EIS School Board would like to formally request an extension of the deadline to submit statements (15th January, 2024). The end of the school and working year is a very busy period for everyone, making it impossible to gather input, clarify certain questions and draft a more informed statement.

Please confirm this by email to schoolboardeis@gmail.com, or to Matt Cobb (+358 50 552 0448) so that we know if we have been granted an extension to write a full statement.

The EIS School Board fully supports the expansion of English-language education in Espoo (increasing the number of student places). We welcome investment to support families who need English-language education; in line with Espoo City's focus on internationalization and growth. The Board also welcomes the opportunity to re-evaluate the pupil admission criteria for English-language provision in Espoo, as this is an issue which has huge implications for children and families in Espoo (and those considering moving to Espoo).

Due to the very limited time, however, the board has many questions and concerns about the proposed changes. These are listed below (in addition to the initial comments and edits in the attached document (*Englanninkielisen opetuksen oppilasvalintaperusteet 1.1.2024 lukien_SU ja EN_track changes*)).

Initial questions & comments regarding proposed changes

Admission criteria

"The applicant has studied in English- language education for at least one year immediately before the application. The guardian must present a school report of the studies as an attachment to the application form."

- The Board feels that studying for one year may be sufficient for grade one applicants, but 2 or more years would be required for students applying to e.g. grade 3, perhaps even more years for students applying to higher grades.

Related questions

1. How can a school (e.g. EIS) assess the reliability / credibility / trustworthiness of school report forms submitted (especially in the age of AI-generated content)?
2. How can we be sure how much of that tuition was actually in English?
3. If a student is admitted, based on a school report, and then subsequently cannot manage the tuition in English in Espoo, what should happen? Is there a process for that, and how would that be communicated to prospective parents? (It is a huge personal commitment to relocate, and if that is based on an inaccurate assessment of English language skills, the consequences could be very significant for the child and family).
4. Without an independent test / exam (e.g. run by EIS teachers), how can we be sure that the applicant achieves the required standard and skills to manage education in English in Espoo?
5. What happens after the "temporary" period expires (see edited document)? We would need to agree some guidance on that.

Resources

6. Admitting students to a temporary study place will require a substantial additional investment of time to authenticate this information. Can the school trust the parents' account and depend on the information they provide regarding their temporary residency in Espoo?

Other matters raised

7. Learning disorders or special educational needs (especially in relation to taking the entrance tests), e.g. dyslexia... How do we ensure that applicants are not discriminated against? (this is a large question, but one that we feel needs careful consideration, given that it affects a significant percentage of children)
8. Moving to Espoo - what is to prevent people from renting an apartment in Espoo to get an Espoo address, sub-letting it to someone else, and then their child applying to EIS?

Students admitted for a temporary period (maximum 3 years)

- The Board discussed that these students would not need to study Swedish, as they are required to study Finnish as a second language anyway.
- Temporary students whose 3 years are up in the spring of 8th grade - what do they do in 9th grade as they will need to sit the entrance exam? There might be students who receive a higher score and these 'temporary' students might not get a study place.

Applying from abroad

Is there provision for families to apply from abroad before committing to a move to Espoo/Finland and registering an address in Espoo? How could a family be expected to relocate, sign housing and employment contracts before knowing if their child will have a place at an English-language school?

- The applicant has temporarily moved to Finland from abroad.
- The applicant lives in Espoo temporarily.

9. What exactly does 'temporarily' mean?

10. It could be worth considering a system where there is a certain limit (e.g. 5 places) for students applying from abroad (in all grade levels) - the number and timing needs to be discussed.

The Board's main concern at this stage is the timescale. Is it possible to work through the questions and concerns above (and probably others) by Friday 1st December?

Once again, the Board would recommend an extension to this process so that we can consider these matters thoroughly. It would also be prudent to check and discuss these issues and questions with education leaders in Helsinki and Vantaa. A logical, practical, clear, unified, well-communicated approach to pupil admission criteria for English-language provision in the whole capital area would reinforce Finland's efforts to attract and retain foreign workers - with a fair and transparent basis for all.

EIS School Board