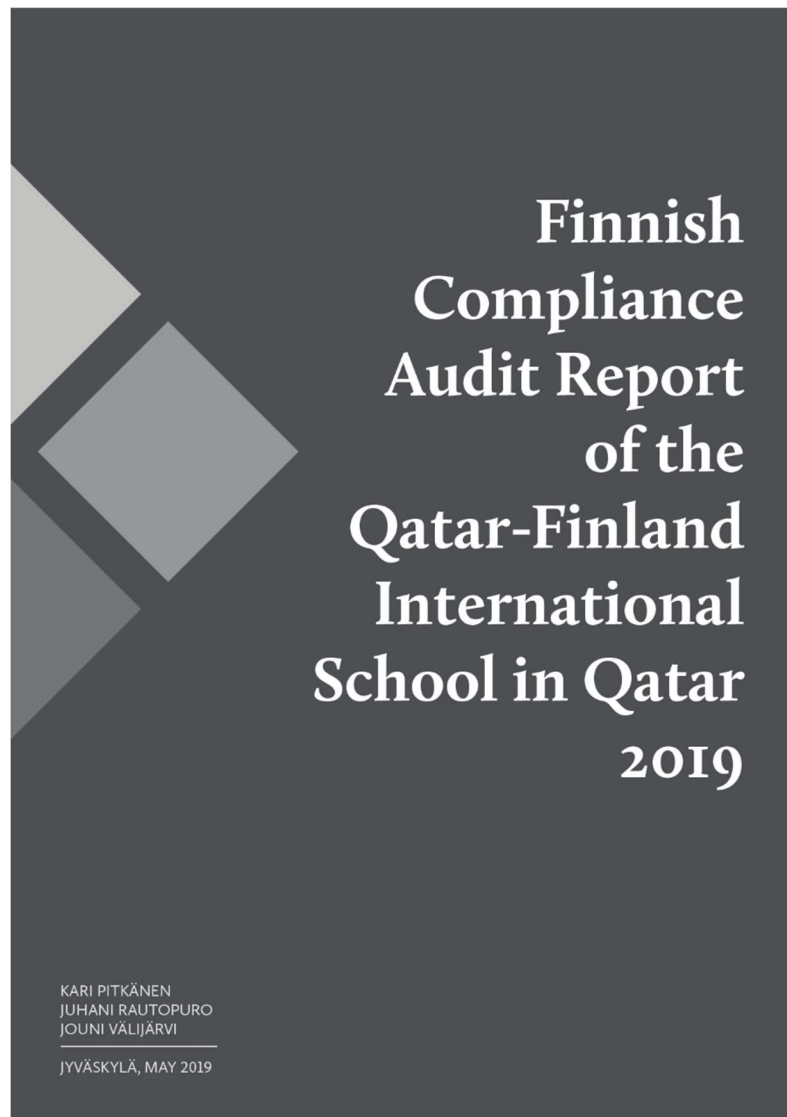


Abridged version of the

Finnish Compliance Audit Report of the Qatar-Finland International School in Qatar 2019



Abridged version of the Finnish Compliance Audit Report of the Qatar-Finland
International School in Qatar 2019.

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The purpose of this abbreviated version is to give an overview of the Finnish Compliance Audit and its results to the general reader. Details concerning the school operations, policies, personnel, and other school-specific data has been removed, as they may contain sensitive information not suitable for publishing. The detailed development suggestions given by the audit team are removed as well, as they are intended solely for the school's internal development purposes.

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Foreword

The *Finnish Compliance Audit Report of the Qatar-Finland International School in Qatar 2019* has been compiled by:

Professor **Kari Pitkänen** is a social scientist who has specialized in population issues, including the role of education in social processes. He has had several academic positions at the University of Helsinki since 1974 and was the Head of the Sociology Department from 2000 until 2007 when he became the Director of Education at the University of Jyväskylä. In 2011 he was appointed Director of Strategic Planning and Development. Prof. Pitkänen has been the key person in building the renowned University of Jyväskylä student welfare program called Student Life. He has supported the Faculty of Education in developing international programs in teacher training and educational leadership. He has also participated in several educational evaluation processes in both Finland and abroad.

Professor **Juhani Rautopuro** is based at the Finnish Institute for Educational Research (FIER) which is a national centre for educational research and evaluation in Finland. FIER investigates, assesses and develops the Finnish educational system and school culture, and is the international and national coordinating entity of several international benchmarking studies and surveys. Professor Rautopuro is head of the ***Educational Systems and Society*** research area at FIER which has a main focus on international assessment studies (e.g. PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) in Finland. He is also a Docent (Adjunct Professor, Evaluation of Education) at the University of Helsinki. He has previously worked at the Finnish National Board of Education and at the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre. His main research areas are assessing learning outcomes in general education, equitable student assessment, teaching and learning of quantitative methods in education, and the risk of exclusion of education.

Professor **Jouni Välijärvi** has been Director of the Finnish Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä since 1996. He has been National Project Manager of the OECD PISA since 1998 and represented Finland in the IEA since 1996. He has been a member of various expert groups at the OECD, EU, Ministry of Education, National Board of Education, Finnish Teacher Union and Council of Finnish Municipalities. He is a member of the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre and chair of the Higher Education Evaluation Committee. Having been a member or chair for more than 30 expert or advisory groups intended to develop e.g. pedagogy, curriculum, evaluation, STEM and education systems on national and international levels, Välijärvi has published numerous articles in scientific journals, books, newspapers and teachers' and education providers' professional publications, and given lectures in more than 30 countries about these topics.

1 Introduction

This report is the product of a Finnish Compliance Audit Pilot (FCA Pilot), conducted in April 2019, at the Qatar-Finland International School (Q.F.I. School) in Doha, Qatar. EduCluster Finland has operated the school for nearly five years, and the purpose of the Audit, essentially, was to serve as a quality assurance process. In addition to this audit, the school is also subject to an audit conducted by the Qatar Ministry of Education. This audit is linked with the Qatar National School Accreditation programme, which is imperative for schools operating in Qatar.

As has been stated in several documents prepared by the school, as well as on the school website (accessed in April 2019), the mission of the Qatar-Finland International School is to provide “world-class education”, resting on the internationally acclaimed Finnish education excellence. The latter part of this statement is in the core of the process of the Finnish Compliance Audit as will be further elaborated below. The audit – as could any school audit – focuses, among other things, on examining the management, regulations, use of finances, curriculum, staffing, teaching practices, and physical environments. The specific characteristic of this audit, however, is to evaluate the “Finnishness” of the Qatar-Finland International School and its operations. The school states that it follows the Finnish National Core Curriculum, albeit localised to meet Qatari standards. This is an important starting point, particularly since the available documentation brings up many essential features of the Core Curriculum: a student-centred approach, a well-functioning student support system, personalised learning paths, phenomenon-based learning, and the idea of prioritising active learning. In addition to using the Finnish National Core Curriculum, the School also emphasises the importance of having qualified teachers who are, as stated on the website, “trained in evidence-based teaching and learning methods used in Finland”. Thus, the essential features of a Finnish school appear to be detectable in the Qatar-Finland International School. The key question then is, does the school implement in reality the vital elements of the Finnish educational system, and in so doing, reach such quality standards that the school truly provides “world-class education”.

The general framework used in the audit is a predefined set of 11 evaluation standards, against which the operations of the school were evaluated:

- Standard 1. Governance and Leadership
- Standard 2. Teaching and Support Personnel
- Standard 3. Financial Resourcing
- Standard 4. Performance Assessment and Evaluation
- Standard 5. Curriculum
- Standard 6. Teaching Arrangements
- Standard 7. Inclusion
- Standard 8. School-wide Student Engagement
- Standard 9. Home-school Engagement
- Standard 10. Physical Learning Environment
- Standard 11. Safeguarding

As already said above, the audit has a special function in helping to determine whether the school implements practices and processes that are in compliance with the Finnish educational ethos, that is, shares the distinguishing characters that can be detected in schools operating in Finland. This is why the framework template has been developed to be in line with two central documents linked to the principles of basic education in Finland: The Finnish Quality Criteria for Basic Education (2012) and Finnish National Core Curriculum 2014.

As is inherent to Finnish quality assurance processes in general, an important goal of the entire process is to assist the school to evaluate their practices and operations, and coupled with the feedback received from the Audit Team, to define development actions needed to further improve the quality of the organisation, and if the school has failed the compliance audit, to become a school that meets the compliance criteria. The indicators also serve as the auditors' checklist when they review the school operations. It must be emphasised that individual indicators have not been measured and the Audit Team has not given them scores. In terms of the audit process, the relevance of individual indicators varies, and thus, the indicators do not have equal weight. The assessment of each Standard is based on a qualitative, overall evaluation.

Based on the audit principles, each Evaluation Standard can be assessed as Excellent, Good, or Insufficient. The role of the Audit Team is to recommend a score for each Evaluation Standard and to give development recommendations to the school. According to the audit criteria the school fails the Compliance Audit if one or more of the Evaluation Standards has failed to reach a minimum target of Good. The highest audit award of Excellent, in turn, requires that six or more Evaluation Standards are assessed as Excellent, and the rest as Good.

The Audit Team was supported throughout the audit process by EduCluster Finland and received in February and March 2019 a substantial set of school policy and other documents and survey results, all of which were linked with the appropriate Standards.

The abundant material was very helpful when the Audit Team made preparations for the site visit. The Team then spent from 1 to 4 April 2019 in Doha at the School. During the site visit the Team conducted non-interventional classroom observations, during which the Team members observed educators' classroom management techniques and student behaviour in both classrooms and other learning environments (e.g., gym and school yard). The Audit Team then interviewed the following:

- The School Principal
- The School Vice Principals (3)
- A group of Finnish teachers teaching grades 3-6
- A group of international (non-Finnish) teachers
- A group of Finnish teachers teaching grades 0-2
- A group of students (members of the student council)
- Lead Expert Minna Repo
- A group of Finnish teachers teaching grades 7-9
- A group of learning assistants

- A group of students' guardians

Furthermore, given the very short time frame for each teacher group interview, the Audit Team invited all teachers to attend an additional interview session.

After the interviews the Audit Team met together each afternoon to share views and to begin the process of preparing the audit report. After the site visit each Audit Team member took responsibility for drafting the sections of the report on specific standards and Kari Pitkänen was responsible for the introductory chapters of the report. The final report, however, is the result of the joint work of the Audit Team members. We are grateful to the EduCluster Finland representatives involved in the audit process and the entire staff of the Qatar-Finland International School for being very helpful and welcoming. The entire educational staff of the school used much of their spare time to attend the interviews and to share their valuable insights on the school and its operations. Thank-you for the positive and interesting opportunity to work with you.

2 Overview of the Qatar-Finland International School and Its Operations

The Qatar-Finland International School started to operate in Doha in 2014. Thus, during the Audit process it has been in operation for less than five years. Currently, the school has grades 0 through 9, but in autumn 2019 the School will launch its Upper Secondary School operations through expanding to grade level 10. The school has grown rapidly. The school had 114 enrolled students during the first academic year 2014-2015. During the first three academic years the student numbers increased exponentially, reaching 604 in 2016-2017. Later, the school has continued to grow, but to a lesser extent. In the academic year 2018-2019, the number of enrolled students is 777.

The students of the Qatar-Finland International School are a very diverse group in terms of their cultural background. The distribution of students by their nationality (2017-2018) shows that the largest group are Qatari (39%), followed by Americans (9%) and Finnish (5%). On top of these countries, students represented more than 60 other nationalities.

In the wake of the growing student numbers, also the number of staff has increased. The number of pedagogical staff was only 19 in 2014-2015, and currently the school employs nearly one hundred educators. The provided data on current staff show that roughly one half of the teachers are class teachers, while most of the other half are subject teachers. The school also has five Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers, and the rest of the pedagogical staff consists of four counsellors (incl. a guidance counsellor), a librarian, and 24 learning assistants.

All the pedagogical staff in the school have formal qualifications for their role as educators, as the staffing policy of the school requires. All the class teachers but one and some subject teachers are Finnish and all of them hold a Finnish Master's degree. The majority of subject teachers are "international", that is, non-Finnish, and all of them hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree or equivalent either from their country of origin or from some other country.

The Audit Team was very impressed with the devotion and dedication of the school's pedagogical staff. Most of them were clearly proud of the school and had high work motivation. The positive attitude toward the school and the high degree of enthusiasm toward the pedagogical work, however, is important for the school to excel because it was clear that many teachers have an alarmingly high workload. High work motivation and the sense of feeling honoured to work in such a good school are likely to counterbalance the stress related to the workload, for the time being, at least. Furthermore, it was obvious that the pedagogical staff having not been trained in Finland was very keen to learn more about current Finnish pedagogical practices. Needless to say, if the school wishes to excel in making use of the Finnish educational and pedagogical practices, it is imperative that the entire pedagogical staff has a good understanding of these practices.

The Audit Team recurrently received information during the interviews pointing to challenges caused by certain specific characteristics related to the composition of the school's student

body and staff. Even though cultural diversity should be viewed as a positive factor, it also sets specific requirements to the school community. The challenges are accentuated by the large turnover of students and pedagogical staff. The Audit Team did not get any specific statistics on the phenomenon, but we understood that student turnover is high, largely because the majority of students are children of expatriate parents who work in Qatar on a temporary basis. We also found out that particularly many teachers from Finland are enforced to leave the school after just a year or two if they wish to hold on to their permanent teaching job in Finland. Two out of three teachers of Finnish origin were working for the school for their first or second academic year, whereas the respective share for the other teachers was one half. These are high percentages and imply high turnover, even when acknowledging that any growing school is expected to hire new teachers to match the increase in student numbers.

The school leadership has taken a lot of effort to tackle the challenges caused by cultural diversity and high student and staff turnover. The school has prepared a multitude of written materials to the staff, students, and their guardians explaining the principles behind school operations and pedagogical practices, and to elucidate the various principles of code of conduct. A central message to the guardians is that they are free to contact the school leadership and teachers when some matters related to their children's studies and learning preoccupies them. Moreover, the pedagogical staff gets many types of support. Among other things, the school organises an introductory week at the beginning of each academic year, and there is a Professional Development workshop programme organising weekly workshops at the school. The school has also created a systematic team structure to support its operations and to further increase teacher interaction.

Despite all the efforts described above and the extensive student support system, teachers reported that student behaviour and learning problems were quite commonplace and required a lot of attention from the teachers. It was also alarming that about one half of the guardians who had responded to the guardian survey reported that their child had been bullied at school. What had been understood by the term "bullying" may not in every case correspond to the usual definition of the word (i.e., being repetitive) but shows clearly how sensitive student interaction can be in a highly multicultural community. It is also clear that professional development programmes and teacher interaction are extremely important, considering the turnover of teachers and the substantial share of teachers not having been trained in Finnish type of teacher education. What the school should realise, though, is that all this combined requires a lot of time from the teachers and differs from a typical Finnish school. The pressure experienced by teachers is likely to have a negative effect on the experienced stress levels. A good practice appeared to be that a learning assistant was assigned to every class in grade levels 0-2.

3 Review of the Standards

3.1. Standard 1. Governance and Leadership

The main point of this Standard is to assess how successful the school leadership has been in creating a clear strategic vision for the school and to develop an environment in which the entire school community understands the strategic objectives and is willing and capable of executing processes in such a manner that the strategic development goals can be reached. The vision, coupled with teaching and learning objectives, should be in compliance with the school's mission to implement the Finnish educational ethos.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Good

3.2. Standard 2. Teaching and Support Personnel

This standard focusses on the role of qualified and competent teaching support personnel. Their task is to ensure that the school's vision, mission, and the learning objectives are fulfilled. The general description of the school's recruiting policy is included in the Human Resources Policy document, but it mainly focusses on technical aspects of staffing.

The expectations are, beyond the sufficient formal qualifications of the pedagogical staff, that the school's structures and processes support personal development of the staff and create a school spirit that drives the staff to contribute to continuous building of the school as a collaborative learning community. Teachers are also expected to develop innovative curricular practices. In addition, the school should integrate the support personnel to promote the learning objectives.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Excellent

3.3. Standard 3. Financial Resourcing

The main point of this Standard is to assess whether the school has medium to long-term financial plans and consistent practices to resource fulfilment of the school's mission, vision, and the strategic development goals.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Good

3.4. Standard 4. Performance Assessment and Evaluation

This standard assesses whether the school has procedures for reviewing and giving feedback on individual student performance, which fulfil the schools teaching and learning objectives and are in compliance with the Finnish educational ethos. The assessment criteria should be transparent and assessment of individual learning is regularly conducted with the student, and as applicable, guardians. The school is also expected to engage in an annual self-reflection

exercise, based on relevant data. This process should be used for updating of the Education Plan or other corresponding document.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Excellent

3.5. Standard 5. Curriculum

This Standard assesses whether the school implements a curriculum, which is in accordance with the Finnish educational ethos and the strategic development goals. Thus, the expectation is that there is alignment between the intended and the implemented curriculum. The subject topics within the curriculum should connect to the lives of students in meaningful ways, and counselling and career guidance should be built into the curriculum in a way appropriate to students. The implementation should also ensure a high-level of opportunities for personalised learning.

Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Good

3.6. Standard 6. Teaching Arrangements

This Standard emphasises the comprehensive nature of high-quality teaching and learning environment. The school has to focus on the entire personality of each student, not just on developing his/her academic skills. The standard also underscores school's responsibility to take into consideration individual variation in social, physical, and emotional needs, and abilities in teaching arrangements. To meet these criteria the personnel/student ratio has to enable individualised teaching arrangements, the teaching practices have to reflect the Finnish National Core Curriculum and the school's own intended curriculum, the guardians need to be familiarised with the school's pedagogical approaches, and the use of technologies, furniture and other infrastructure has to promote students' learning and other active participation in school activities. In addition, teaching methods provide support for students for whom the language of instruction (English) is not the first language, simultaneously providing encouragement to the families to continue developing the home language(s). Furthermore, the school activities should promote adoption of healthy lifestyles and the extra-curricular learning activities should link to students' interests and development needs.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Good

3.7. Standard 7. Inclusion

This Standard assesses whether the school has an operational plan, and sufficient resources, for identifying special or specific needs of students, and provides support for their learning, growth and wellbeing to enhance their access to and participation in the curriculum. The school has to have means to learning support identification and response processes as an integrated part of the school's operations. The school also has to provide multi-professional support for students.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Excellent

3.8. Standard 8. School-wide Student Engagement

This Standard assesses the school's capability to encourage student involvement in opportunities to influence and participate in activities that complement vision and mission, teaching and learning objectives. The school should have formal structures and processes that enable students to influence and participate in activities, which contribute to the development of the school as a professional community. Thus, the school should have an atmosphere and practices that inspire and empower students as members of the school community.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Good

3.9. Standard 9. Home-school Engagement

This standard assesses how actively the school fosters communication and cooperation with guardians. The expectations are that there is a forum where guardians can raise issues and give their opinions. Thus, communication should be dialogic. The school should also have a policy that enables guardians to visit lessons, observe other educational activities at school, and have the opportunity to discuss questions related to student's studies and learning. Dialogic communication is also the ideal model in Finnish schools.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Excellent

3.10. Standard 10. Physical Learning Environment

This standard assesses whether the school is able to provide a physical learning environment that supports its teaching and learning objectives. The learning environments are expected to be of premium quality, and the premises should be safe and accessible by persons with disabilities.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Excellent

3.11. Standard 11. Safeguarding

This Standard assesses whether the school provides a learning environment that is safe, and which provides health and safety services and plans in case of emergency situations. The expectations are, among other things, that the school has an up-to-date Safety Plan, intervention procedures to handle cases of bullying, and that extra-curricular and other school-related activities are safety compliant.

[Detailed analysis removed]

Score: Good

4 General Assessment and Recommendations

The Compliance Audit of the Qatar-Finland International School was a very positive experience for the Audit Team. During the site visit the Team was able to witness the positive atmosphere at the school, largely because of its highly motivated staff and active and energetic student body. The school's mission and vision is to offer world-class education to its students. The school has taken a lot of effort to prepare an impressive set of rules, practices and processes, taking into consideration the local environment and the large cultural diversity of its student body and staff. The operational framework of the school is the current Finnish National Core Curriculum (for basic education), emphasising particularly the values and ideals of the Finnish educational system that are embedded in this document. **The Audit Team's conclusion is that the school and its operations are in compliance with the Finnish educational principles and ethos, to the extent that a school operating outside Finland can be while also following the principles of its country of location.**

Yet, there is always some room for further development. The opinion of the Audit Team is that the school could become even a better educational institution by initiating a systematic strategy process, during which the most urgent development needs are identified and actions planned for the next few years.

[List of 14 detailed development suggestions removed]

Appendix 1. The List of Policy and Other Documents Provided for the Audit Team

- School self-evaluation
- Q.F.I. School Curriculum
- Q.F.I. School Operational Plan (includes a number of policy statements)
- Results of a School Principal Survey
- Results of a School Teacher Survey
- Results of a School Learning Assistant Survey
- Results of a Guardian Survey
- Results of a Staff Survey
- Q.F.I. School staff
- A document describing the Student Support Centre
- School Strategic Framework
- School's Vision, Mission, Concept of Learning (to be used in introductory documentation)
- Mission and Vision from the Self Study Report
- Board of Trustees in the main Agreement
- Organisational Structure and Team Structure
- Team Description
- KPI Framework
- Class Observation Sheet
- Personal Development Activities for 2017-2018
- Q.F.I. School Professional Development, general description
- Staff Questionnaire (2017-2018)
- Parent Handbook (2018-2019)
- Staff Handbook (2018-2019)
- Admissions Policy
- Parent Interview Form for Admission
- School Language Programme
- Guidance Counselling Plan
- Q.F.I. School Organisation and Operations
- Human Resources Policy (Draft)
- Personal Development Plan for 2018-2019
- Development Discussions
- Q.F.I. School Language Policy
- Orientation documents for teachers
- List of iPads and Student Laptops in the school building
- List of application on the iPads
- Insurance Policy
- Student's Personal Learning Plan, an example
- Student's Individualised Education Programme, an example
- Student/Faculty Ratio
- Document on pedagogical use of ICT

- Contents to cover during Q.F.I. School tour for potential client families
- Extra-Curricular Activities at Q.F.I. School
- School Policy Document for Guardians
- School description on safe physical learning environment
- School Canteen Inspection Report
- School Health and Safety Plan
- School Behaviour Policy
- The Professional Code of Conduct



Appendix 2: Compliance certificate

[Picture of signed and stamped certificate here]