

Publisher

Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC)

Title of publication

Piloting of the national evaluation tools for early childhood education and care

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The Ministry of Education and Culture has appointed the National Education Evaluation Centre FINEEC to prepare research-based evaluation tools for early childhood education and care (ECEC), to draw up quality criteria, and to participate in the development of the national digital quality evaluation system (Valkea). Valkea and the evaluation tools to be incorporated into it can be used for collecting information and producing analyses to support the development of ECEC at both local and national levels. In winter 2021, FINEEC piloted six evaluation tools related to pedagogical ECEC activities. The evaluation tools piloted were based on the quality indicators published by FINEEC in 2018, which verify essential and desired characteristics for high-quality ECEC.

The purpose of the pilot project was to produce information on the functionality of the evaluation tools and the planned evaluation process. Data was also produced on how the evaluation tools can be used in future evaluations being carried out at ECEC centres and in the development of activities. This report describes the main results of the pilot and the development measures derived from them. They will be applied to the completion of the tools and the development of the Valkea evaluation system.

The pilot was carried out in 153 randomly selected municipal and private ECEC centres, including both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking facilities. Regarding family day care, the pilot was implemented in one municipality. Feedback on evaluation tools and the implementation of the evaluation process was collected from both personnel and management.

From FINEEC's point of view, the pilot project can be considered successful and the direction in which the evaluation system is being developed can be considered correct. The piloted tools and the planned evaluation process supported the personnel's reflective approach to work, promoted the joint reflection of the personnel and helped them identify the strengths of and development areas in their own pedagogical actions. The results of the pilot also show that the tools for ECEC and the claims included in them were well suited for evaluating and developing activities, and they were considered practical.

The pilot also brought up development needs. The evaluation tools, the claims included in them and the assessment scales need to be reviewed and specified. The feedback on the summary report mainly addressed the need to clarify and summarise its content. The development needs that came up in relation to self-evaluation discussion included clarifying the instructions given, longer response time and the development of self-evaluation questions. FINEEC will make use of the feedback gathered in the pilot to complete the development of the evaluation tools and Valkea.

Keywords: early childhood education and care, process factors of quality, evaluation tool, evaluation criterion, enhancement-led evaluation