

## **Social empowerment project for children**

The City of Espoo's Growth and Learning Sector is implementing a social empowerment project for children in collaboration with the Espoo Union of Evangelical Lutheran Parishes. Social empowerment refers to developing essential life skills, such as emotional and peer relationship skills.

The project aims to support children's social skills, promote community and well-being, and prevent social exclusion. It involves the 4th- and 5th-grade pupils from 25 schools in Espoo, with approximately 130 classes participating during the 2024–2025 school year. When the project ends on 30 June 2027, around 260 classes will have participated.

The City of Espoo's Growth and Learning Sector has selected Meritori and Kalajärvi Schools for the project's pilot phase, starting in September 2024. Activities with other participating schools will begin in January 2025.

## **Community-supporting lessons and camp centre days for children**

Key project activities include lessons that support well-being and community, as well as camp centre days. The activities take place during the school day as part of the regular curriculum in collaboration between the pupils' own teachers and project staff. During the school year, each class will receive approximately six lessons and one camp centre day.

## **Experienced class teachers lead the activities**

The project team consists of a project manager and three project workers. The project manager is Dr. **Raili Keränen-Pantsu**, who brings expertise in project management and impact assessment. The project workers are M.Ed. **Annika Kilpeläinen**, M.Ed. **Heidi Hietikko**, and M.Ed. **Pia Saarelainen**, each with extensive experience as a class teacher and strong skills in community support and teaching well-being skills. One additional project worker will start in January 2025.

## **The Espoo Parish Union implements and funds the project**

The project and all its activities are religiously, ideologically, and politically neutral, meaning they are intended for all pupils regardless of their worldview. No religious symbols will be displayed during the project activities. The project is part of the school–church partnership agreement between the City of Espoo's Growth and Learning Sector and the Espoo Parish Union.

## **Research collaboration with Helsinki and Tampere Universities**

Research collaboration will be conducted with the Universities of Helsinki and Tampere as part of the project. The aim is to study, among other things, the project's impact on enhancing inclusion and community. Participation in the research is voluntary, and consent from the pupils and their guardians will be sought for any research activities involving individuals under 18.