

# Music lessons enhance the quality of school life

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A new study, published in Music Education Research, examined whether an extended music education had an impact on pupils' experienced satisfaction with the school. Nearly a thousand pupils at ten Finnish schools with extended music classes and comparison classes participated on a survey that measured the quality of school life at Year 3 and Year 6.

According to the results, the differences between the extended [music classes](#) and the comparison classes were significant in majority of factors at Year 6, namely general satisfaction, opportunities and achievement, identity in the class and the [classroom climate](#). There were no differences between the groups at Year 3, which suggests that a particular factor affects [pupils'](#) attitudes during the primary [school](#) years. The most likely explanation is the amount of [music lessons](#) which was four hours per week for the extended music classes and one lesson per week for the normal classes.

Merely attending an extended education class at Year 3 did not cause differences in school satisfaction. To explore whether belonging to any extended education class would confer the same benefits in the quality of school life, some extended education classes with an emphasis on [visual arts](#) and sports were included in the analysis. However, school satisfaction in these classes did not differ from the normal ones at Year 6.

"Singing in a choir and ensemble performance are popular activities at extended music classes. Other studies have established that people find it

very satisfying to synchronize with one another. That increases [affiliation](#) within the group and may even make people like each other more than before. Other subjects in the school do not have as [intensive training](#) in [synchrony](#) and coordination as music lessons, which could explain part of the phenomenon," says Doctoral Student Päivi-Sisko Eerola, the principal investigator of the study at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

A partial answer to the observed results may be that girls usually tend to give more positive scores on satisfaction towards school in school satisfaction studies and they also comprise the majority of pupils at extended music classes. However, the gender differences do not fully explain the observed results. In fact, it seems that extended music classes improve the quality of school life more for boys than girls.

The Finnish school system has been especially appraised in international evaluations for its equality. Extended music education is almost the only case when pupils in the primary school are selected according to their abilities – in music.

"The Finnish system of extended music education is quite unique in the world. This is why similar studies have not been done elsewhere," says Eerola. However, she finds it plausible that singing and making music together, the main ingredients of the extended music education, could be incorporated to any school system – naturally within the bounds of national curriculum. The benefits of having a few extra hours of art and self-expression via music every week are dramatic and indispensable.

"There is a strong correlation between the children's enjoyment of school and the amount of teachers on sick leave. In this respect, pupils' satisfaction makes the school better place for all!" Eerola concludes and wishes everybody a nice autumn term at school.

**More information:** The study was published in *Music Education Research*: [dx.doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2013.829428](https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2013.829428)

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