

Natasha Asghar MS international travel to Helsinki, Finland

August 26th- 29th 2025

Overview: As Finland has one of the best-performing education systems, I visited Helsinki to explore what the country was doing right and to see if there was anything we could introduce here in Wales to boost our educational performance.

August 26th - Travel day

August 27th - I kick-started my trip with a meeting with Finland's State Secretary to the Minister for Education, Mikaela Nylander at the Ministry of Education and Culture.

We discussed a range of topics including tackling poor behaviour, PISA results, illiteracy, tackling teacher recruitment and retention, and school transport.

We also talked about Finland's recent decision to introduce a mobile phone ban in schools - something the Welsh Conservatives have pledged to do. Support for ALN pupils, apprenticeships, and school funding were also topics discussed at the meeting.

I then headed to the University of Helsinki to meet with the Dean of



the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Professor Johanna Mäkelä, and Vice-Dean Arto Kallioniemi.

We talked about the importance placed on university research, the high-level of education teachers are required to have before entering the classroom, the international student scene and the country's free education system.

The current state of universities in Wales was also a hot topic of discussion for the group, as was Finland's supply teacher set-up..

August 28th -

I visited the Viikki Teacher Training School to meet with administrative principal Tapio Juhani Lahtero and his team.

We discussed the current rates of illiteracy in Wales, the way the teaching profession is valued in Finland, teacher salaries, how to boost teacher numbers, tackling teacher burn-out, equipping teachers with the skills to support ALN students.

Homeschooling, the use of AI in teaching, free school meals, absenteeism, and apprenticeships were also talked about during the meeting.



I finished my short trip to Finland with a meeting at the British Embassy with Laura Davies, the British Ambassador to Finland.

During the meeting, we talked about Finland's military conscription, the recently introduced mobile phone ban, school funding, Finland's decision to stop school inspections, and difference between Finland and Wales' examination process.

We also discussed the wider topics in Finland such as crime rates, domestic abuse, Finland's welfare system, current issues with immigration and the gender pay-gap.

August 29th – Travel day

Conclusion: It is clear Finland is doing a lot of things right when it comes to its education system and it was refreshing to hear and see the importance placed on giving youngsters the best possible start in life. Whilst Finland may be experiencing some issues when it comes to its education offering, such as teacher burn-out, they



are nothing compared to what we are experiencing here in Wales.

It is imperative the government starts to seek answers and learn best practices from other countries.

The trip to Finland was extremely eye-opening and what I have learnt will certainly help shape my policies and work.