The new national curriculum
A guide for parents

Introduction

For generations, parents have found themselves visiting primary schools with their children only to hear themselves saying, "It's not like when I was at school." Things change quickly in education, and at no time in the past 25 years has that been truer than September 2014 when the whole school curriculum changes for maintained schools throughout England.

This guide is intended to support parents of primary school children. Obviously it would be impossible to set out in detail everything your child would learn during their six years of statutory primary education, but by providing an outline of typical content and some background information about how the curriculum and assessment works, hopefully it will help parents support their children in making the most of their education.

What's changed?

English, Maths and Science remain very important and are considered the core subjects in both primary and secondary education. The National Curriculum sets out in some detail what must be taught in each of these subjects, and they will take up a substantial part of your child's learning week. Alongside these are the familiar foundation subjects: Art, Computing, Design & Technology, Foreign Languages (age 7+ only), Geography, History, Music, and Physical Education. For these foundation subjects, the details in the curriculum are significantly briefer: schools have much more flexibility regarding what they cover in these subjects.

Much of the publicity about the changes to the curriculum has focussed on 'higher expectations' in various subjects, and it is certainly the case that in some areas the content of the new primary curriculum is significantly more demanding than in the past. For example, in mathematics there is now much greater focus on the skills of arithmetic and also on working with fractions. In science, a new unit of work on evolution is introduced for Year 6; work which would have previously been studied in secondary school. In English lessons there will now be more attention paid to the study of grammar and spelling; an area which was far less notable in previous curricula.

High Achievers
If your child is achieving well, rather than moving on to the following year group's work many schools will encourage more in-depth and investigative work to allow a greater mastery and understanding of concepts and ideas.

The new curriculum begins in schools from September 2014. However, for children in Year 2 and Year 6, the new curriculum won't become statutory until 2015. This is because these children are in the last year of the Key Stages. At this age, children are formally assessed to judge their progress against the requirements of the curriculum. Because the 2014 curriculum will only have been in place for nine months, these children will be assessed against the requirements of the old curriculum in the National Curriculum Tests. New tests will be produced for the summer of 2016 to assess work from the new curriculum.

Tests your child will take

Lots of schools use tests at all stages of their work. For the most part, these are part of a normal classroom routine, and support teachers' assessment. However, at certain stages of schooling there are also national tests which must be taken by all children in state schools. Often informally known as 'SATs', the National Curriculum Tests are compulsory for children at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Children in these year groups will undertake tests in Reading, Mathematics, and Grammar, Punctuation & Spelling. The tests will be sent away for marking, and results will be reported to schools and parents at the end of the year.

The new National Curriculum Tests for children in Year 2 and Year 6 will take place each summer from 2016. Schools may also choose to have internal tests for other year groups around the same time.

Where previously these tests – and other teacher assessments – were graded in levels (normally numbering between Level 1 and Level 6 in primary school), from 2016 the tests will be reported as a scaled score, with a score of 100 representing the expected level for each age group. It will be up to teachers and schools to decide how to measure progress in the intervening years. Schools will then provide accompanying information to parents to explain how children are progressing – it makes attending those parents' evenings all the more important!

The new national curriculum – Mathematics in Year 2

During Key Stage 1, there is a big focus on developing basic number skills. That means securing a good understanding of place value, and recognising number bonds to 20. Practising these skills frequently will help children's mathematical thinking throughout school.

Number bonds are essential to the understanding of maths. Children in Year 2 learn their number bonds to 20, that is being able to quickly recall the total of any two numbers up to 20, e.g. 5 + 9 = 14, rather than having to count on to find the answer.

At the end of Year 2, all children will sit the National Curriculum Tests for Key Stage 1. This will include a short arithmetic test of 15 questions, and a second paper of broader mathematics which will last around 35 minutes.

Number and Place Value

- Recognise place value in two-digit numbers, e.g. knowing that the 1 in 17 represents 10
- Read and write numbers up to 100 as words
- Count in 2s, 3s and 5s
- Compare and order numbers up to 100
- Use the < and > symbols to represent the relative size of numbers

Calculations

- Recall number bonds up to 20 fluently
- Add and subtract numbers mentally and using objects, including two-digit numbers
- Show that adding two numbers can be done in any order, but subtracting cannot
- Recognise that addition and subtraction are inverse operations
- Learn the multiplication and division facts for the 2x, 5x and 10x tables
- Show that multiplying two numbers can be done in any order, but dividing cannot
- Solve problems using the x and ÷ symbols

Fractions

- Find $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{2}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ of an object or set of objects
- Find the answer to simple fraction problems, such as finding $\frac{1}{2}$ of 6

Measurements

- Use standard units to measure length (centimetres and metres), mass (grams and kilograms), temperature (degrees Celsius) and capacity (millilitres and litres)
- Use the £ and p symbols for money amounts
- Combine numbers of coins to make a given value, for example to make 62 pence
- Tell the time to the nearest five minutes on an analogue clock
- Know the number of minutes in an hour and hours in a day

Shape

- Identify the number of sides and a line of symmetry on 2-d shapes
- Identify the number of faces, edges and vertices on 3-d shapes
- Use mathematical language to describe position and direction, including rotations and turns

Graphs and Data

- Construct and understand simple graphs such as bar charts and pictograms

Parent Tip
Parents can always take a lead role in practical maths. Encouraging your child to help with the purchasing of small items at the newsagent, or measuring themselves and others, is a great way to start exploring number relationships.

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The new national curriculum – Science in Year 2

In the first years of schooling, much of the science curriculum is based around real-life experiences for children. This includes everyday plants and animals, as well as finding out about different materials and the four seasons. There are likely to be lots of opportunities for exploring scientific ideas both in the classroom and the local surroundings.

Scientific Investigation

Children are encouraged to carry out their own observations and experiments to further their scientific understanding. In Year 2 this may include learning to:

- Use scientific apparatus to make observations, such as magnifying glasses
- Collect information about what they have seen
- Make links between observations and their scientific understanding

Living Things and their Habitats

- Compare the difference between things which are alive, which are dead, and which have never been alive
- Understand that different animals are suited to different habitats
- Identify some plants and animals in different habitats
- Describe how animals feed on other plants or animals

Habitats are simply the different types of places living things are found. This can range from the vast, such as oceans and rainforests, through to local features such as rock pools, or to the small, such as under a single log.

Plants

- Describe how seeds or bulbs grow into plants
- Understand that plants need water, light and a suitable temperature to grow

Animals including Humans

- Notice that all animals have offspring which grow into adults, including humans
- Know about the basic survival needs of animals, such as food, water and air
- Describe the importance of exercise, healthy diet and hygiene to humans

Everyday Materials

- Identify and compare the uses of different materials including wood, metal, plastic, glass, brick, rock, paper and cardboard
- Find out how some solid objects can be changed by squashing, bending or stretching

Parent Tip

Growing your own plants or flowers at home can be an exciting – if slow – process for children to take part in. Why not try some quick-growing seeds such as cress or mustard, as well as something more substantial planted in the garden, and watch how the processes of growth are similar for all plants?

At certain times of year you may also be lucky enough to witness some of the growth cycle in animals, such as tadpoles in a pond, or lambing season at the local farm.

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The new national curriculum – English in Year 2

As children move through Key Stage 1, the new curriculum intends that almost all children will secure the basic skills of decoding so that they can become fluent readers. As their reading confidence grows they can begin to write their own ideas down.

Decoding is the ability to read words aloud by identifying the letter patterns and matching them to sounds. Once children are able to 'decode' the writing, they can then start to make sense of the words and sentences in context. Watch out for hard-to-decode words such as 'one' and 'the'. These just have to be learned by heart.

At the end of Year 2, all children will sit the National Curriculum Tests for Key Stage 1. These will include two short reading tests, a grammar and punctuation test, and a spelling test of ten words.

Speaking and Listening

The Spoken Language objectives are set out for the whole of primary school, and teachers will cover many of them every year as children's spoken language skills develop. In Year 2 some focuses may include:

- Articulate and justify answers and opinions
- Give well-structured explanations and narratives, for example in show-and-tell activities

Reading Skills

- Read words aloud confidently, without obvious blending or rehearsal
- Learn letter patterns so that decoding becomes fluent and secure by the end of Year 2
- Blend letter sounds, including alternative patterns, e.g. recognising 'ue' as the 'oo' sound
- Read aloud words which contain more than one syllable
- Recognise common suffixes, such as –ing and –less
- Read words which don't follow phonetic patterns, such as 'one' and 'who'
- Become familiar with a wide range of fairy stories and traditional tales
- Discuss favourite words and the meaning of new words
- Check that what has been read makes sense, and self-correct reading where necessary
- Make predictions about what might happen next in a story

Children will be expected to read aloud books which are appropriate for their reading ability. During Year 2 their increasing knowledge of decoding should allow them to read a wide range of children's books.

Writing Skills

- Form letters of the appropriate size, using capital letters where appropriate
- Use appropriate spaces between words when writing
- Begin to use joins between letters where needed
- Spell longer words by breaking them into their sound parts
- Learn to spell some common homophones, recognising the difference between them
- Use the possessive apostrophe in simple phrases, such as 'the boy's football'.
- Write about real events and personal experiences
- Plan out writing in advance, including by writing down key words
- Re-read writing to check that it makes sense and to make corrections, including punctuation
- Use question marks, exclamation marks, apostrophes and commas in lists
- Use the present and past tenses correctly in writing
- Begin to write longer sentences by using conjunctions, such as 'and',' but', 'if' or 'because'

Homophones are words which sound the same, such as 'blue' and 'blew', or 'one' and 'won'

Parent Tip
Reading aloud at home continues to be vitally important at this age. You may even get your child to read their own writing aloud, attempting to add expression appropriate to the sentence.

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The new national curriculum – The Foundation Subjects

At primary school, English, Maths and Science are the core subjects which make up the bulk of the timetable. That said, the other foundation subjects play a key part in providing a broad and balanced curriculum. All eight of these subjects are a compulsory part of the National Curriculum. In addition, all schools are required to include some Religious Education in their broader curriculum, although the content of this is agreed locally.

Here is a very brief outline of what will be covered in the foundation subjects during primary school:

Art

Schools will be largely free to design their own curriculum in Art, while providing a broad experience for their students. Children will explore a range of different techniques such as drawing, painting and sculpture, and will use a variety of materials, from pencil and paint to charcoal and clay, to create their own art pieces. In addition, during Key Stage 2, children will study the works of some great artists, architects and designers from history.

Computing

There are three main strands of the new Computing curriculum: information technology, digital literacy and computer science.

Information technology is about the use of computers for functional purposes, such as collecting and presenting information, or using search technology. Digital literacy is about the safe and responsible use of technology, including recognising its advantages for collaboration or communication. Finally, computer science will introduce children of all ages to understanding how computers and networks work. It will also give all children the opportunity to learn basic computer programming, from simple floor robots in Years 1 and 2, right up to creating on-screen computer games and programmes by Year 6. Many schools will use programming software which is freely available online, such as Scratch or Kodu.

All schools will also include regular teaching of e-safety to ensure that children feel confident when using computers and the Internet, and know what to do if they come across something either inappropriate or uncomfortable. Many schools will also invite parents to work with them on this aspect of the curriculum.

Design and Technology

This subject includes cooking, which will be taught in all primary schools from 2014, with children finding out about a healthy diet and preparing simple meals. It also includes the more traditional design elements in which children will design, make and evaluate products while learning to use a range of tools and techniques for construction. There may also be some cross-over with Science here as children incorporate levers, pulleys or electrical circuits into their designs for finished products.

Geography

Across primary school, children will find out about different places in the UK, Europe and the Americas through studying small regions in each, and comparing these to other areas, including their own locality.

In Key Stage 1, children will learn the names of the continents and oceans as well as the names of the four home nations and their respective capital cities. They will use the four main compass directions and simple maps and photographs to explore the local area.

In Key Stage 2, the children will locate the countries of the world, focussing particularly on Europe and the Americas, as well as naming the counties, regions and major cities of the United Kingdom. They will begin to explore geographical features such as volcanoes and tectonic plates, as well as features of human geography such as trade links and land use. They will also learn to use grid references on Ordnance Survey maps to describe locations.

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The new national curriculum – The Foundation Subjects

History

In Key Stage 1, the focus of history is very much on locally significant events or events within their own memories, as well as key events of great significance such as Bonfire Night. In addition, children will find out about important historical people and events, such as Florence Nightingale or The Great Fire of London.

In Key Stage 2, there are nine main areas of study that are required, some of which have optional strands. The first four are units relating to British history and are intended to begin the development of a clear chronological understanding. In many schools these will be taught in chronological order.

1. Britain in the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages
2. Roman Britain
3. Anglo-Saxons and Scots in Britain
4. Anglo-Saxons and Vikings
5. Local history
6. A study of a period after 1066 of the school's choice
7. Ancient Greece
8. A choice from Ancient Egypt, Ancient Sumer, Ancient Egypt, or the Shang Dynasty of Ancient China
9. A choice from 10th-century early Islamic civilisation, Mayan civilisation or Benin in West Africa

Languages

For the first time, foreign languages will be compulsory in schools for children in Key Stage 2 (Years 3 to 6). Schools can choose any language to study, although they should bear in mind the languages available in partner secondary schools. Over the course of their four years in Key Stage 2, children will be expected to make good progress in the main language chosen, learning to ask and answer questions, present ideas to an audience both in speaking and writing, read a range of words, phrases and sentences, and write simple phrases, sentences and descriptions. If the school chooses a modern language, such as French or Spanish, then children will also learn about the appropriate intonation and pronunciation of the language.

Music

Over the course of primary school, children will listen to and perform a range of music. In the first years of schooling this will often include singing songs and rhymes, and playing untuned instruments such as tambourines or rainmaker sticks.

In Key Stage 2, children will perform pieces both alone and as part of a group using their own voice and a range of musical instruments, including those with tuning such as glockenspiels or keyboards. They will both improvise and compose pieces using their knowledge of the different dimensions of music such as rhythm and pitch. During the later years they will also begin to use musical notation, and to learn about the history of music.

Physical Education

Physical Education lessons will continue to include a range of individual disciplines such as dance and athletics, with team sports and games. Through these sports, children should learn the skills of both cooperation and competition.

During Key Stage 2, the range of games and sports taught will be broader, and the children will also take part in outdoor and adventurous activities such as orienteering. They will perform dances, take part in athletics and gymnastics, and attempt to achieve personal bests in various activities.

In addition, all children should learn to swim at some point during their primary school career.

This guide has been developed for schools by Michael Tidd and Rising Stars © Rising Stars 2014

For more information on the National Curriculum please visit www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum

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