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 3

During the years of lower Key Stage 2 (Year 3 and Year 4), the focus of mathematics is on the mastery of the four operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) so that children can carry out calculations mentally, and using written methods. In Year 3 your child is likely to be introduced to the standard written column methods of addition and subtraction.

Number and Place Value

- Count in multiples of 4, 8, 50 and 100
- Recognise the place value of digits in three-digit numbers (using 100s, 10s and 1s)
- Read and write numbers up to 1,000 using digits and words
- Compare and order numbers up to 1,000

Calculations

- Add and subtract numbers mentally, including adding either 1s, 10s or units to a 3-digit number
- Use the standard column method for addition and subtraction for up to three digits
- Estimate the answers to calculations, and use inverse calculations to check the answers
- Learn the 3x, 4x and 8x tables and the related division facts, for example knowing that $56 \div 8 = 7$
- Begin to solve multiplication and division problems with two-digit numbers

Fractions

Equivalent fractions are fractions which have the same value, such as $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{6}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{2}{8}$.

- Understand and use tenths, including counting in tenths
- Recognise and show equivalent fractions with small denominators
- Add and subtract simple fractions worth less than one, for example $\frac{5}{7} + \frac{1}{7} = \frac{6}{7}$
- Put a sequence of simple fractions into size order

Measurements

- Solve simple problems involving adding and subtracting measurements such as length and weight
- Measure the perimeter of simple shapes
- Add and subtract amounts of money, including giving change
- Tell the time to the nearest minute using an analogue clock
- Use vocabulary about time, including a.m. and p.m., hours, minutes and seconds
- Know the number of seconds in a minute and the number of days in a year or leap year

Shape and Position

- Draw familiar 2-d shapes and make familiar 3-d shape models
- Recognise right angles, and know that these are a quarter turn, with four making a whole turn
- Identify whether an angle is greater than, less than or equal to a right angle
- Identify horizontal, vertical, perpendicular and parallel lines

Parallel lines are those which run alongside each other and never meet. Perpendicular lines cross over each other meeting exactly at right angles.

Graphs and Data

- Present and understand data in bar charts, tables and pictograms
- Answer questions about bar charts that compare two pieces of information

Parent Tip
Most schools will have a calculation policy which sets out the order in which calculation strategies are taught. Check on your child's school's website to see if they have one for parents that shows what methods are used in school and when they are usually introduced.

Using this guide

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The new national curriculum – Science in Year 3

During Key Stage 2 (Years 3 to 6), the strands of science begin to become more recognisable as biology, chemistry and physics, although they will usually be grouped together in primary school. Children will continue to carry out their own experiments to find out about the world around them, and to test their own hypotheses about how things work.

Scientific Investigation

Investigation work should form part of the broader science curriculum. During Year 3, some of the skills your child might focus on include:

- Set up simple comparative tests, ensuring that they are carried out fairly
- Make systematic observations, using appropriate equipment and standard units
- Gather and record information to help to answer scientific questions
- Use results to draw simple conclusions or to raise further questions
- Use straightforward scientific evidence to answer questions

Plants

- Identify the basic functions of a plant's roots, stem/trunk, leaves and flowers
- Understand that plants need air, light, water, nutrients and room to grow
- Understand the role of flowers in the life cycle, including pollination and seed dispersal

Pollination is the act of reproduction in which pollen is transferred – usually to another plant – to make seeds. Seed dispersal is the distribution of seeds by actions such as sprinkling, through the wind, or by being eaten as part of a fruit.

Animals including Humans

- Know that animals get their nutrition from food, and need the right types and amounts of nutrition
- Identify that humans and some other animals have skeletons and muscles, and know their basic functions

Rocks

- Compare and group different types of rocks based on their appearance and properties
- Describe how fossils are formed
- Recognise that soils are made from rocks and organic material

At this level, rocks are often grouped into one of three categories:
Igneous: rocks formed from magma under the Earth's surface, often after a volcano, or deep underground.
Metamorphic: rocks formed under great heat or pressure under the Earth's surface, such as slate or marble.
Sedimentary: rocks formed where sediment builds up in deposits under lakes or oceans.

Light

- Recognise that we need light to see things
- Notice that light is reflected from surfaces
- Know how shadows are formed, and identify how the size of a shadow changes

Forces and Magnets

- Notice that some forces need contact to act, but that magnetic forces can act at a distance
- Observe how magnets attract or repel each other, describing magnets as having two poles
- Compare and group objects according to whether or not they are magnetic

Parent Tip
Many families will have a magnet of some form about the house, and this makes a great tool for scientific investigation. A fun experiment is to compare whether household objects are attracted to magnets, such as keys, tins, cans, and even different denominations of coin.

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The new national curriculum – English in Year 3 and Year 4

In lower Key Stage 2, your child will build on their work from the infants to become more independent in both their reading and their writing. Most children will be confident at decoding most words – or will have extra support to help them to do so – and so now they will be able to use their reading to support their learning about other subjects.

They will begin to meet a wider range of writing contexts, including both fiction and non-fiction styles and genres.

Speaking & 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 Years 3 and 4, some focuses may include:

- Use discussion and conversation to explore and speculate about new ideas
- Begin to recognise the need to use Standard English in some contexts
- Participation in performances, plays and debates
- Explain thinking and feeling in well-structured statements and responses

Reading skills

- Extend skills of decoding to tackle more complex words, including with unusual spelling patterns
- Read a wide range of fiction, non-fiction and literary books
- Recognise some different forms of poetry
- Use dictionaries to find the meanings of words
- Become familiar with a range of traditional and fairy tales, including telling some orally
- Identify words which have been chosen to interest the reader
- Ask questions about what they have read
- Draw simple inferences about events in a story, such as how a character might be feeling
- Make predictions about what might happen next in a story
- Summarise ideas from several paragraphs of writing
- Find and record information from non-fiction texts
- Take part in discussions about reading and books

Children begin to identify how authors choose words for effect, for example by selecting 'wailed' instead of 'cried', or 'enraged' rather than 'cross'. They may begin to make such choices in their own writing, too.

Writing skills

- Write with joined handwriting, making appropriate join choices
- Spell words that include prefixes and suffixes, such as anticlockwise
- Spell some commonly misspelt words correctly, taken from the Y3/4 list
- Use a dictionary to check spellings
- Use possessive apostrophes correctly in regular and irregular plurals, such as children's and boys'
- Use examples of writing to help them to structure their own similar texts
- Plan out sentences orally to select adventurous vocabulary
- Use paragraphs to organise ideas
- Use description and detail to develop characters and settings in story-writing
- Write interesting narratives in stories
- In non-fiction writing, use features such as sub-headings and bullet points
- Review their own work to make improvements, including editing for spelling errors
- Read others' writing and suggest possible improvements
- Read aloud work that they've written to be clearly understood
- Extend sentences using a wider range of conjunctions, including subordinating conjunctions
- Use the present perfect verb tense
- Use nouns and pronouns with care to avoid repetition

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English in Year 3 and Year 4 continued

- Use conjunctions, adverbs and prepositions to add detail about time or cause
- Use fronted adverbials
- Use direct speech, with correct punctuation

Young children have a tendency to repeat nouns or pronouns, leading to several sentences containing 'He' or 'They'. They can use alternatives to make writing more interesting. For example, alternatives for describing an individual character might include: he, the burglar, Mr Smith, John, the criminal, the villain, etc.

To add information to a sentence about its location, children might use conjunctions ("Although it was still early…"), adverbs ("Early that morning…") or prepositions ("At about six-thirty that morning…"). Often these techniques allow children to write more complex sentences.

Grammar Help

For many parents, the grammatical terminology used in schools may not be familiar. Here are some useful reminders of some of the terms used:

- Present Perfect tense: a tense formed using 'have' and a participle, to indicate that an action has been completed at an unspecified time, e.g. The girl has eaten her ice-cream
- Fronted adverbial: a word or phrase which describes the time, place or manner of an action, which is placed at the start of the sentence, e.g. "Before breakfast,…" or "Carrying a heavy bag,…"
- Direct speech: words quoted directly using inverted commas, as opposed to being reported in a sentence

Parent Tip

When children are writing outside of school – or when you are looking at school work with them – why not discuss their choices of vocabulary? Some common words, such as 'went' and 'said' can often be replaced by more specific words that give a sense of the action, such as 'raced' or 'yelled'. You can also take opportunities to look at words like this that crop up in books you read with your child, considering how the choice of word affects your understanding of a story.

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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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