

What is KS2 (Key Stage 2)?

Every child's education is split into 4 key stages, starting in Year 1 and going all the way to Year 11. [Key Stage 2](#) (KS2) is the key stage taught in Years 3 to 6, when children are between 7 and 11 years-old.

Must all schools teach KS2?

KS2 is a part of the National Curriculum. This tells schools what subjects to teach and it tells teachers which topics to cover and at what level. Only state-funded local authority-maintained schools are obliged to follow the National Curriculum. Independent (private) schools, free schools and academies are free to set their own curriculums – though, in reality, most do stick to the National Curriculum.

As well as subjects and topics, the National Curriculum also sets out how KS2 pupils should be tested or assessed and the level they should achieve.

Which subjects are taught in KS2?

The National Curriculum sets out what children in KS2 should be taught. There are 11 mandatory subjects:

- English
- Maths
- Science
- History
- Geography
- Ancient and modern foreign languages
- Art and design
- Music
- Design and technology
- Physical education (which must include swimming)
- Computing (often called information and communication technology or ICT)

Religious education is also a subject on the National Curriculum and all state-maintained schools have to teach it. Lessons should cover a range of religions, not just one. However, if parents don't wish their child to be taught about religious beliefs different to their own, they can choose to exclude their children from these lessons.

PSHE (personal, social and health education) is optional in KS2. It teaches children about staying safe, looking after themselves and living a healthy lifestyle. PSHE is meant to teach children positive social skills and how to understand other people's feelings. In Key Stage 2, PSHE also includes topics like puberty, sex, relationships and emotional health. As with RE, parents have the right to remove their child from sex education lessons.

Citizenship is another optional subject at primary level. It's similar to PSHE, but introduces pupils to debating, critical thinking, politics and law.

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How are children assessed in KS2?

At the end of each key stage, including KS2, children's abilities are formally assessed. How well they do in these assessments is measured against the level expected by the Government.

At the end of Year 6 (when KS2 finishes) children must take a set of national tests.

Which tests are taken in KS2?

The tests taken at the end of KS2 are:

- English grammar, punctuation and spelling
- English reading (reading and understanding text)
- Mathematics (arithmetic and reasoning)
- Science (biology, chemistry and physics)

How are KS2 tests graded?

KS2 tests are graded in a different way to what you might expect. Pupils' scores in the tests are converted into numbers between 85 and 115. A score of 100 is the expected standard, so any score over 100 means the child is doing better than required and less than 100 means the child is below the level set.

What are SATs?

The National Curriculum tests taken by primary school pupils are also known as SATs (standard attainment tests). Their main purpose is to make comparing schools easier. How well their pupils perform in SATs is how schools are ranked in league tables.

SATs have come under much criticism. Many people believe that tests in primary school place young children under academic stress. It's also been said that the tests narrow the curriculum as schools may 'teach to the test' in order to up their standing. Two teachers' unions (the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers) voted to boycott the tests in 2010. They called for SATs to be replaced by teacher assessment. But they were ultimately unsuccessful and SATs remain.

How important are SATs?

As the primary function of SATs is to compare schools, you might think that a child's individual performance is not that important. But it's in every child's interest to do well. SATs results are the main tool used by secondary schools when streaming new pupils into different classes.

What is the 11-Plus?

It's not a part of the National Curriculum, but many children in KS2 will have to take another exam – the Eleven-Plus (11+). Even though it's now quite rare, I think it deserves a mention in this guide to upper-primary education.

Years ago all children in the UK, except in Scotland, had to sit their Eleven-Plus. It was an exam taken in the final year of primary school which decided which secondary school children would attend. Most education authorities stopped using the Eleven-Plus long ago but a few do still use it. As a guide, the Eleven-Plus is taken in Buckinghamshire, Essex, Kent, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire. Apart from these, some other boroughs also use the Eleven-Plus so, if you want to be sure whether or not your child has to take it, you'll have to ask their school.

The aim of the Eleven-Plus is to find the very brightest pupils. It's a test of intelligence rather than of academic ability. The Eleven-Plus exam varies between local authorities. It consists of four sections, and pupils will be tested on some or all of them. The sections are:

- English
- Maths
- Verbal reasoning (solving logical problems)
- Non-verbal reasoning (solving pictorial problems)

Selective schools are often very popular and over-subscribed, and the Eleven-Plus pass level can be very high. Some grammar schools only take the top 3% of applicants, while more open ones accept the top 30%.

KS2 sets out the subjects studied, topics covered, tests taken and expected standards for children in upper primary school.