

# How does the National Curriculum Affect Primary Schools?

The [National Curriculum](#), chosen by the Government, applies to all state primaries. It's a set of guidelines telling schools the subject areas they must teach to children of different ages. It also decides how and when they should assess their pupils.

Most primary schools have to teach specific subject areas in lessons, chosen by the government. This is called the National Curriculum. There is also a curriculum for secondary schools, which we look at in another article. For now, let's find out more about how the National Curriculum affects children in primary schools, and when and how primary school children are tested and assessed.

## What is the National Curriculum?

The National Curriculum was first introduced in 1988 to all state schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It gives schools a list of subjects and topics they should teach for different age groups. The government also makes schools measure the standards their pupils achieve, using national tests and teachers' assessment.

## Why do we have a National Curriculum?

A national curriculum means that all children (of the same age) in England are learning the same things, no matter which school they go to. This keeps education consistent across the country. It also makes it easier to keep track of children's progress and achievement levels if they are all following the same standards.

This is useful if your child moves schools. Covering the same topics and learning the same things in every school, a child should be able to move without it affecting their progress, or leaving gaps in their education.

## Do all Schools Follow the National Curriculum?

The National Curriculum is not compulsory for all schools – only state primaries and secondaries. Schools that don't have to follow the curriculum are academies, free schools and private schools. And home-schoolers do not have to conform to it, either.

Currently (in 2016) there are 2,440 academies, out of a total of 16,766 primary schools. The present government wants all schools to convert to academies by 2020.

Whether they have to or not, many schools do follow the National Curriculum to provide a learning framework and allow them to compare test results with other schools. But don't worry if your school doesn't!

**The National Curriculum is a set of guidelines telling schools the subject areas they must teach to children of different ages.**

## What are Key Stages?

Year groups are separated into 'key stages' and the National Curriculum outlines what each level should be taught at that stage. Pupils take various tests and teachers make assessments at the end of each key stage to see how they are performing.

## What Ages, Years and Assessments are in Each Key Stage?

The relevant years/assessment expectations (at April 2016) are:

- Preschool children, aged 3 to 4, are in the Early Years key stage. There are no assessments
- Reception children, aged 4 to 5, are also in the Early Years key stage. They are assessed by their teachers at the end of the year and there's also an optional assessment at the start of the year
- Year 1 children, aged 5 to 6, are in KS1. They have a phonics screening check at the end of the year
- Year 2 children, aged 6 to 7, are also in KS1. At the end of the year they must take national tests and teacher assessments in English, maths and science
- Year 3, 4, 5 and 6 children, aged 7 to 11, are in KS2. There are no assessments until the end of Year 6 when children must take national tests and teacher assessments in English and maths, and teacher assessments in science

## Which Subjects are Taught in Primary Schools?

The National Curriculum requires children to be taught the following subjects: English, maths, science, history, geography, art & design, music, design & technology, physical education (including swimming) and computing.

Religious education should be taught in all schools – covering a range of religions, but parents have the option to exclude their children from these lessons, if they do not wish their child to be taught about religious beliefs different to their own.

Optionally, modern foreign languages (e.g. French) are often taught in Key Stage 1, and ancient (e.g. Latin) and modern foreign languages in Key Stage 2.

Other popular subjects that are frequently taught in schools at both Key Stages are PSHE (which stands for 'personal, social and health education') and citizenship.

PSHE teaches children about staying safe, how to look after themselves, and healthy lifestyles. The subject is intended to teach children positive social skills and how to understand other people's feelings. In Key Stage 2 children will be introduced to puberty, sex, relationships and emotional health.

Citizenship is compulsory in secondary education, but is optional at primary level. It is similar to PSHE, but introduces pupils to debating, critical thinking, politics and law.

## How are Primary School Children Tested?

The National Curriculum and its assessment requirements regularly change (most recently, May 2016). Children are tested nationally at the end of each key stage, either by class tests or teacher assessments to monitor their educational progress against the national average. These National Curriculum tests are also known as SATs (standard attainment tests).

At early years foundation stage children are assessed at the end of reception class by the teacher. Don't worry! Children do not have to take any formal tests and progress will be recorded purely on their performance in lessons, according to the teacher's observations.

Year 1 pupils have their phonics skills checked at the end of the year.

At the end of Year 2 (when KS1 finishes) and Year 6 (end of KS2) all children are required to take national tests or be assessed by teachers in English, maths and science. Schools try to make these as comfortable as possible, like an ordinary class test, rather than a scary exam.

## What are the New National Tests in Primary Schools?

In May 2016, new National Tests were introduced for Year 2 and Year 6 pupils. These tests are different in the way in which results are recorded and compared. Pupils will receive a scaled score.

Test scores are published online so parents can compare their children's scores with the national average.

## What Tests are Taken in Key Stage 1?

At the end of KS1, Year 2 pupils are required to complete tests in:

- Key stage 1: English grammar, punctuation and spelling test framework
- Key stage 1: English reading test framework
- Key stage 1: mathematics test framework

## What Tests are Taken in Key Stage 2?

Test frameworks for the new Key Stage 2 national curriculum tests:

- Key stage 2: English grammar, punctuation and spelling test framework
- Key stage 2: English reading test framework
- Key stage 2: mathematics test framework
- Key stage 2: science sampling test framework

So, how does the National Curriculum affect primary schools? Quite a lot! It sets out what children should be taught, the topics they should cover, the tests they must take and the levels they should achieve. In preparation for tests and learning for National Curriculum subjects and topics, encourage your child to try Education Quizzes!