

What is KS3 (Key Stage 3)?

[Key Stage 3](#) (KS3) is the part of the National Curriculum taught to children between the ages of 11 and 14 in the first 3 years of secondary school. It sets out the subject areas covered and also how pupils are tested and the standard they should achieve.

As a parent, one of the phrases you'll have heard is 'key stage'. But what exactly is a key stage and, more specifically, what is Key Stage 3? Well, every child's education is split into four key stages. Key Stage 3, or KS3, is the part taught to children between the ages of 11 and 14.

KS3 begins when pupils start secondary education. It's a part of the National Curriculum and so sets out which subjects have to be taught. It also determines how children should be tested and what standards they should achieve. KS3 is not that different to primary education, except the level of achievement is obviously higher and the lessons harder.

Must all Schools Teach KS3?

Only state-funded local authority-maintained schools have to follow the National Curriculum, of which KS3 is a part. Free schools, academies and private (independent) schools are all free to choose their own subjects. However, most of them do stick to the National Curriculum as it provides a sound framework for them to follow.

How Does the Change from Primary to Secondary School Affect Children?

The change from KS2 to KS3 also means a change of schools from primary to secondary. This upheaval can affect children in different ways. Many of them find the change daunting and it can be a challenging time for parents too. Children are faced with hundreds of new fellow pupils, together with larger new surroundings, and lots of different teachers. KS3 can take some getting used to!

What do Secondary Schools do to Help Children in Year 7 Adjust?

Secondary schools are aware of how overwhelmed Year 7 pupils may feel. Many of them work together with primary schools so that children know what to expect. Teachers might visit primary schools to introduce themselves, schools may hold open evenings to give children a chance to look around. Primary classes might also visit the secondary school to see what it's like. They might even spend a whole week there in the summer term, so they know what to expect in September. All of these measures help youngsters adjust to life in Year 7.

Travelling to school may be a big change too and many children will have to start taking a bus to their new school. But all of this helps to improve children's independence and they should soon take KS3 in their stride.

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Which Subjects are Taught in KS3?

The National Curriculum sets out which subjects secondary school pupils are taught in state-funded local authority-maintained schools. There are 3 'core' subjects (maths, science and English) and a further 9 'foundation' subjects which must be taught in KS3. Here's the list in full:

- Maths
- English
- Science
- History
- Geography
- 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)
- Citizenship

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.

All secondary pupils in local authority-maintained schools must also be taught sex and relationship education. However, as with RE, if parents don't wish their children to have these lessons they can withdraw them from the class.

How are Children in KS3 Assessed?

Prior to 2008, pupils in state-funded schools, including most academies and free schools, had to take part in National Curriculum assessments (otherwise known as SATS) when they reached the end of Year 9, the final year in KS3. However, SATS for 14-year-olds were abolished to lessen the burden on schools.

In place of KS3 SATs, pupils are now assessed by their teachers. This may be done by looking at their coursework or by making children complete in-school tests. Each pupil's level is compared to that set by the Government. KS3 children are expected to reach level 5 or 6 (as a comparison, KS2 children should reach level 4 and KS1 level 2).

Though there are no longer national tests in KS3, how well children do in this key stage is quite important. Their grades in individual subjects will affect which subjects they choose for their 'options'.

What are 'Options'?

During Year 9, when children are 13 or 14 years old, they have to choose which subjects they want to study over the course of KS4 - their 'options'. These are the subjects they'll take for their GCSE exams.

Schools do their best to inform pupils about options, but it's a good idea for parents to offer advice too. If they are going to do well then it's important that children choose subjects they like and ones they are good at, as well as ones which may be beneficial to their chosen career.

Which Subjects are Compulsory Options?

Some subjects are compulsory in GCSE and so must be taken as options. These are:

- English
- Maths
- Science

Schools which do not follow the National Curriculum may have some more subjects which pupils have to take. As well as these three 'core' subjects, pupils must also be taught PE and citizenship, though there is no exam in these mandatory subjects.

What are 'Entitlement Areas'?

Which subjects are available as options varies between schools. However, each child must be offered at least one course in each of four groups of subjects, called 'entitlement areas'. These are:

- The arts (art and design, music, dance, drama and media arts)
- Design and technology (electronics, food technology, graphics, resistant materials, systems and control, textiles and product design)
- The humanities (geography and history)
- Modern foreign language (French, German, Spanish etc.)

Each school is different and, in some, certain subjects may be restricted and others (particular languages for example, like Spanish) may not be offered at all.

Options are the subjects children will take for their GCSE exams.

So, that's KS3. It's an important stage in education when children move up to secondary school and make choices which may affect their future education and their possible careers. But, now you know exactly what it entails you should be in a better position to help your child through this critical key stage.