



Guidance

Curriculum
and Standards

Secondary
National Strategy
for school improvement

A condensed Key
Stage 3: Designing
a flexible curriculum
2006 update

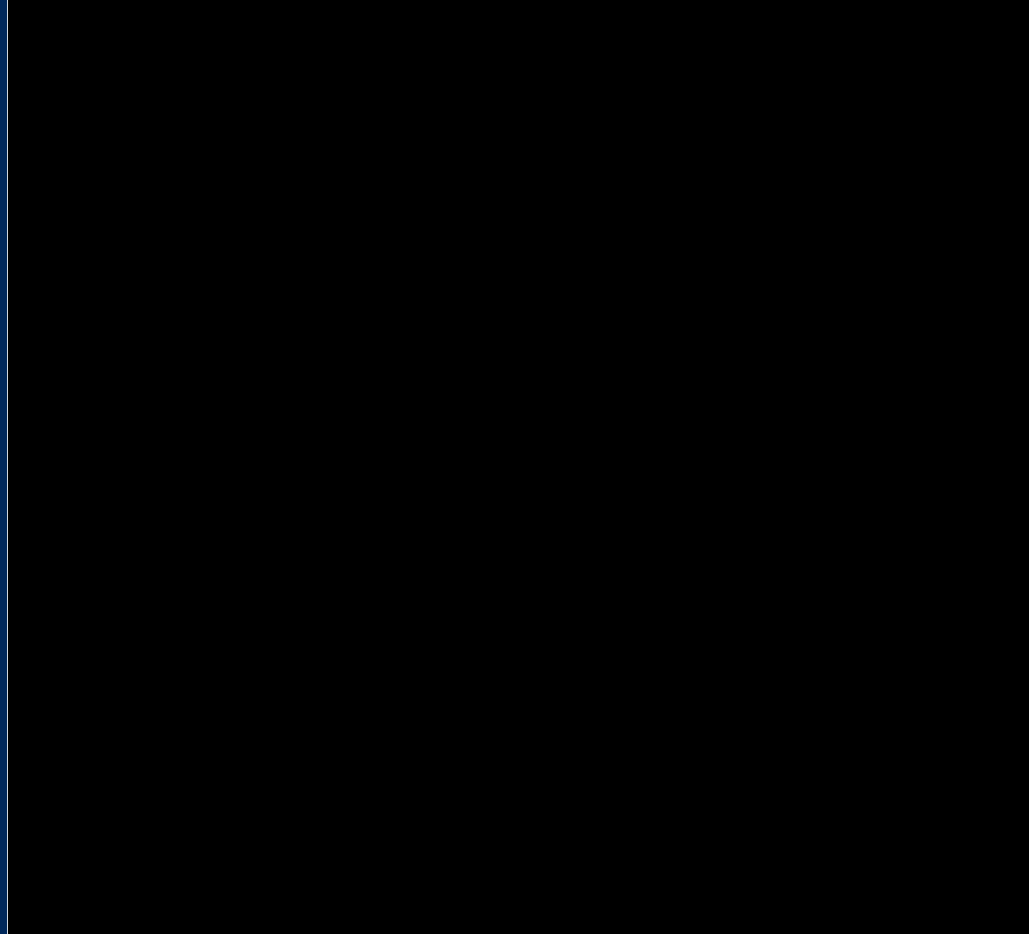
**Headteachers, school
strategy managers,
senior leaders and
subject leaders**

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1 Introduction

Background

The 2001 Green Paper *Schools: Building on Success* proposed a two-year Key Stage 3 pilot and this was initiated in February 2003 as part of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. The aims of the project are to develop ways of completing programmes of study for Key Stage 3 in two years that will:

- increase the pace of learning and raise standards;
- enhance pupils' motivation and engagement;
- improve transfer between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3;
- increase curriculum flexibility through the use of saved time in Key Stage 3 and throughout the 14–19 phase.

About this document

This document is an update to the earlier publication *A condensed Key Stage 3: Designing a flexible curriculum* (DfES 0798-2004). That document was intended to help schools to make effective use of the flexibility in the Key Stage 3 curriculum and was based on early findings from the two-year Key Stage 3 project. This update should be read in conjunction with that document. It describes important changes in the way that the results of pupils who have taken National Curriculum end-of-key stage tests early are reported. It also highlights lessons that have been learned from the ongoing evaluation of the two-year Key Stage 3 project, including the evaluation carried out by Ofsted, and identifies implications for any school implementing, or considering implementing, a condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum.

The explorative nature of a condensed Key Stage 3

The two-year Key Stage 3 project is ongoing and explorative. The impact of the project is being evaluated by Ofsted and LSE/NFER and some of the findings of the Ofsted evaluation are described in this document. The final Ofsted report was completed at the end of the

autumn term 2005 and the LSE/NFER report is due to be completed in autumn 2006. Consequently, lessons will still be learned from the project as the evaluation continues.

Pupils have only one opportunity to learn and achieve in Years 7, 8 and 9. Any school contemplating a two-year Key Stage 3 should be confident that participating pupils would achieve at least the same level of success in the condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum as they would have in three years. Equally it is important for the school to have systems in place that will enable pupils following a condensed programme in Years 7 and 8 to revert to a three-year programme if their learning is not on target to meet at least national expectation by the end of Year 8.

2 Changes in reporting arrangements

A condensed Key Stage 3: Designing a flexible curriculum highlights that any pupil may take the end-of-Key Stage 3 statutory assessments (the National Curriculum tests and teacher assessments) in any subject at the end of any year during the key stage (page 5). The criteria for entering a pupil for an end-of-key stage assessment early are:

- the headteacher judges that the pupil has completed the Key Stage 3 programme of study;
- the pupil is ready to move onto the Key Stage 4 programme of study;
- the pupil has reached at least the nationally expected standard of level 5/6.

A pupil does not have to take all the National Curriculum statutory assessments in the same year, and it should not be assumed that all pupils within a year group will take the same statutory assessment at the same age. Guidance to support teachers in making the decision about when pupils should be entered for the National Curriculum tests is contained in *A condensed Key Stage 3: Designing a flexible curriculum* (page 35).

The requirement for reporting the results of pupils who have taken a statutory assessment early changed in 2005.

Prior to 2005, the results of each statutory assessment were reported in the year that an assessment was taken and contributed to that year's performance tables. For example, if a pupil had taken the end-of key stage test in mathematics in Year 8 in 2003 but took the tests in English and science in Year 9 in 2004 then it is likely that their mathematics result was reported in 2003 and their English and science results in 2004.

From 2005, the results of the statutory assessments are reported cumulatively. In other words, a pupil's results in the National Curriculum end-of-key stage tests are reported the year in which that pupil takes their final test. For example:

SCENARIO:	REPORTING REQUIREMENT:
Pupil A: takes English, mathematics and science tests in Year 8 in 2005	All results reported in 2005 and appear in that year's performance tables
Pupil B: takes English and mathematics test in Year 8 in 2005 and takes science test in Year 9 in 2006	Results of the tests taken by these pupils in Year 8 are not included in the school's results for 2005 and do not appear in that year's performance tables
Pupil C: takes mathematics test in Year 8 in 2005 and takes English and science tests in Year 9 in 2006	All results reported in 2006 and appear in that year's performance tables.
Pupil D: takes English, mathematics and science tests in Year 9 in 2006	All results reported in 2006 and appear in that year's performance tables

3 Evaluation of the project: implications for schools

The first groups of pupils in project schools that followed a condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum in some subjects in Years 7 and 8 completed the programme in the summer term 2005. Ofsted's evaluation of the project focused largely on this group of pupils. Pupils following other models for a condensed curriculum (for example, following Key Stage 3 programmes in Years 8 and 9 after using Year 7 as an intervention year) have not yet completed the programmes of study at the time of writing.

This section summarises the lessons learned from the initial two terms of planning and then the first two years of implementation of the project.

Summary of findings so far

A condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum is not appropriate for all schools and it is clearly not applicable to all pupils within a school. No one model for a condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum is preferable to or more effective than any other.

However, a condensed curriculum can be successful in a school where:

- it is well matched to the particular circumstances and needs of pupils;
- there are clear expectations for what will be gained by implementing a condensed curriculum, including high expectations for the achievement of pupils;
- a school's provision and capacity for improvement support effective implementation.

The Ofsted evaluation has identified a number of characteristics from the more effective schools that are essential to the successful implementation of a condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum:

- commitment and support for implementing a condensed curriculum from everyone involved: senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers, governors, pupils and parents;
- clear and thoroughly-considered aims and objectives for both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 based on the benefits which pupils will derive from following a condensed curriculum;

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- the reasons for considering a condensed curriculum together with its implementation build on and extend existing good practice;
 - strong emphasis on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment with effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating provision.
 - curriculum planning that considers the needs of all pupils whether they are following a condensed curriculum or not. This includes ensuring that there are planned opportunities for pupils to have their programmes adjusted as required by their rate of progress in each key stage;
 - a climate which encourages and supports teachers in planning the curriculum and their teaching flexibly, exercising professional expertise;
 - effective procedures for supporting the transfer of pupils from Year 6 to ensure that teachers of Year 7 are well-informed about pupils' prior attainment and their strengths and weaknesses, thus providing an effective start on the Key Stage 3 programmes of study;
 - good quality planning and teaching to ensure that teachers increase the pace and quality of teaching and learning in order to complete programmes of study in less time;
 - rigorous assessment and tracking of pupils' progress which supports their learning, teachers' planning and the monitoring of the effectiveness of the condensed curriculum.

High-quality school improvement planning is a key to effective implementation. To be successful, a condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum requires effective monitoring and evaluation of impact so that no pupils are disadvantaged.

Attainment and progress

Early analysis of the attainment and progress made by pupils following a condensed curriculum suggests that it may be more successful in increasing the pace of learning in some subjects than others.

Ofsted judged that on the basis of lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work, whilst some groups of pupils had progressed faster than they would have done on a conventional three-year programme, most would not reach their expected end-of-key-stage level by the end of Year 8.

Care must be taken in interpreting the results of pupils who took the National Curriculum tests in Year 8 in 2005 due to the varied range of pupils that different schools entered for the tests. Some schools entered all pupils, many entered only those that they assessed as working at level 5+, some schools entered higher-attaining pupils only, whereas some entered their average-attaining pupils.

Early analysis suggests that, for those pupils who entered Key Stage 3 at level 4:

-
- the proportion of those who followed a two-year curriculum and progressed by one or two levels in English and mathematics was at least as high as the proportions of those who followed a three-year programme;
 - the proportion of those who followed a two-year curriculum in science and progressed by one level was at least as high as the proportion of those who followed a three-year programme, but a smaller proportion of pupils progressed by two or more levels.

For those pupils who entered Key Stage 3 at level 5:

- the proportion of those who followed a two-year curriculum and progressed one level in English and mathematics was similar to the proportion of those who followed a three-year programme, but a smaller proportion progressed by two or more levels;
- the proportion of those who followed a two-year curriculum and progressed by one or more levels in science was significantly smaller than those who followed a three-year curriculum.

Any school implementing a condensed curriculum should ensure therefore that they:

- **choose carefully the subjects and pupils for whom a condensed curriculum is likely to be of benefit;**
- **continually assess and track the progress of different groups of pupils following a condensed curriculum to inform planning and support learning;**
- **only enter pupils for the National Curriculum end-of-key stage tests when they have made the expected progress from Key Stage 2.**

Transfer from Key Stage 2

Ofsted described arrangements for transfer from Year 6 to Year 7 as good or better in most project schools. There has been increased concentration on using data and information to ensure that pupils make a brisk start in Year 7. In addition, teachers in the project schools have developed closer links with Year 6 teachers and pupils. This has been a crucial factor in ensuring that teaching and learning in Key Stage 3 builds on pupils' previous experiences. Middle schools in particular have taken good advantage of teachers' knowledge of pupils to ensure a smooth transition and have used the latter part of the summer term in Year 6 to make an early start on Key Stage 3 programmes of study.

However, the collection of data on Year 6 pupils continues to prove difficult for some schools, mostly where there are large number of primary schools from which pupils transfer.

Suggestions for improving transfer from Key Stage 2 and some example case studies from project schools can be found in *A condensed Key Stage 3: Improving Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 transfer* (DfES 0003-2006DOC-EN).

Any school implementing a condensed curriculum should ensure therefore that they:

- **work with their partner primary schools so that pupils are well prepared for the transfer;**
- **plan for curriculum and pedagogical continuity and progression between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3;**
- **provide teachers at the beginning of Year 7 with the information they need to meet the needs of individual pupils and to build on what pupils already know, understand and can do.**

Curriculum and planning

Few project schools have adjusted the proportion of teaching time for different subjects in order to implement a condensed curriculum. Many schools have developed a range of pathways to cater for pupils with different levels of attainment and rates of progress through Key Stage 3 and into Key Stage 4. This ensures that there are suitable programmes in Year 9 for pupils who have taken a statutory assessment at the end of Year 8 and for those who need more time to complete a programme of study in Year 9.

Many project schools completing Programmes of Study in Years 7 and 8 have planned to use the time saved to start and complete GCSE and other Key Stage 4 courses early or to provide three years for them. In some cases a broader range of choices is being provided in Year 9 and beyond. For example, in one school pupils will take three GCSEs from English, English literature, media and theatre studies. Some schools have also planned to use the time to provide enrichment and a wider range of experience for pupils in Year 9. This has involved 'enterprise' education in one school and project-based thinking skills in another. Ofsted expressed some concerns about continuity and progress of pupils in some schools as they moved into Year 9 and beyond. They were particularly concerned about whether the needs of pupils attaining below level 5 were being met. The most significant difficulty relating to continuity into Year 9 is likely to occur when pupils from middle schools transfer to high schools after Year 8. The advantages pupils have gained by completing the Programmes of Study early could be undermined by lack of progression in Year 9.

In planning to cover a programme of study over two years rather than three, most departments have reviewed the breadth and depth of coverage of particular aspects of their scheme of work but still deliver an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum. Where subject planning has been most effective, departments have reviewed and revised the schemes of work for both Year 7 and Year 8 and then later revised Year 8 schemes in the light of the first year of the project. Departments have used planning to remove unnecessary repetition and duplication of topics and have consolidated elements of the curriculum which would normally be repeated in more than one year into single units of work. In the most successful examples, departments have not merely 'pruned' content, but have taken the opportunity to radically re-think and re-structure the curriculum. This has resulted in a curriculum that focuses on key concepts rather than content coverage. For example, one history department has planned units of work around significant historical questions rather

than content-related topics. In science and mathematics, some departments have increased the emphasis on investigation as a stimulus to increasing the pace of learning.

Any school implementing a condensed curriculum should ensure therefore that they:

- **plan appropriate pathways through Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 for pupils of all levels of attainment that provide for continuity and progression before implementing a condensed Key Stage 3 programme;**
- **revise their schemes of work for the whole condensed curriculum before they begin to teach the programme;**
- **review and re-structure schemes of work rather than merely 'prune' content;**
- **focus on key concepts that develop knowledge, skills and understanding, rather than content coverage.**

Teaching and learning

High quality teaching is necessary for successful implementation of a condensed curriculum. A greater pace of learning is required to effectively cover Key Stage 3 programmes of study in two years rather than three.

In the best lessons observed by Ofsted, although lessons were pacy, teachers were flexible and ensured that pupils had sufficient time to consolidate their learning. A range of active learning methods were used in these lessons and pupils were given greater responsibility for their learning. Questioning was also used effectively to encourage pupils to think and justify their answers and opinions. However, in some lessons, the pace of teaching had increased, but teachers spent too long talking. Consequently, pupils did not have sufficient time to talk about their learning, work collaboratively or to work independently to consolidate their learning or practise and apply skills.

Any school implementing a condensed curriculum should ensure therefore that they:

- **continue to place a strong emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning;**
- **have high expectations for what pupils can achieve;**
- **focus on increasing the pace of learning rather than the pace of teaching so that it matches revised plans;**
- **provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to learn actively, collaboratively and independently;**
- **provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to practice and consolidate their learning.**

Summary of implications

Attainment and progress

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