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The Welsh Government believes that giving learners a sound foundation for the future will benefit children and Wales as a whole in the long term.

Parents and carers have a vital role to play in helping their children to learn and, more importantly, to enjoy school and learning.

This guide will help explain what your child is learning in secondary school. It will give you some ideas about how to help your child and where to get more information and explain how their progress will be measured and reported to you.

Children's education in Wales is divided into four sections or stages.

Primary school

1

The Foundation Phase caters for children aged between 3 and 7.

2

Key Stage 2 is from 7 to 11 years.

Secondary school

3

Key Stage 3 is from 11 to 14 years.

4

Key Stage 4 is for learners aged between 14 and 16.

This guide describes the curriculum as it applies for children in secondary schools aged between 11 and 14 years in Key Stage 3.

You can find information about the other phases of your child's learning at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

What is my child learning?

Children in this age group follow the programmes of study set out in the national curriculum for Key Stage 3. Their education builds on the experiences and learning gained in primary school and prepares them for making decisions about examination courses they will follow later in their secondary education.

The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is designed around subjects and skills. It will provide a firm foundation in language, mathematics and science and will give children the opportunity to achieve their best within a broad and balanced curriculum.

Developing good literacy and numeracy skills, and their use in a wide range of situations, is at the core of learning for children in secondary schools.

We want all young people to be able to read, write and use numbers effectively and confidently to support their future choices in learning and life.

Your child will follow a rich and varied curriculum designed to give them opportunities to learn about:

- English • Welsh or Welsh as a second language
- mathematics • science
- design and technology
- information and communication technology (ICT)
- a modern foreign language • history
- geography • music • art and design
- physical education (PE).

Children must also study religious education (RE) and all secondary schools have to provide some personal and social education (PSE), careers and the world of work, and sex education.

Each school decides the detail of what children will learn and how the school day is organised. They will take account of the requirements we have set out, and organise their own timetable.

Teachers draw up lesson plans and decide which teaching resources and approaches to use. It is up to the school to make sure that its curriculum meets the legal requirements.

Your child's school will be able to provide more information about the way they structure the curriculum and develop skills, as well as details of the content your child will cover.

You can find more information about education and the curriculum in Wales at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

English or Welsh

Children will take part in a programme of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Activities will make sure children develop and extend their abilities as listeners, viewers and speakers.

Children will read widely for pleasure, interest and information and to develop and explain an informed personal opinion about their reading.

The experiences presented to them include opportunities to take part in drama and role-play activities.

They will learn to adapt their language to suit different purposes and audiences, using an

Welsh second language

As children become more confident in speaking Welsh, they build on their skills, knowledge and understanding through a programme of oracy, reading and writing.

Childrens' abilities as listeners, viewers and speakers will be developed and extended and they will speak with increasing fluency.

The experiences presented to them include opportunities to take part in drama and role-play activities.

They will be able to present personal opinions about their reading material, responding appropriately to content and style.

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Mathematics

Children extend their mathematical thinking by solving mathematical problems, working with increasing confidence and flexibility in solving unfamiliar problems or problems in unfamiliar contexts, spoken and written work, explaining their reasoning to others, and using contexts from across the whole range of mathematics and as applied to real-life problems.

Children will extend their understanding of reasoned argument when they come across a number of ways of solving problems by using algebra and geometry. They develop a deeper understanding of the properties of shape, position and movement and collect, represent, analyse and interpret realistic data.

Science

Schools will teach children to apply their scientific skills, knowledge and understanding to design strategies, solve problems and offer explanations, relating scientific ideas to the information about them, including current issues.

They will be given opportunities to study the work of scientists and to recognise the role of experimental data, creative thinking and values in their work and in developing scientific ideas.

Modern foreign languages

Children will have the opportunity to develop communication skills in a modern foreign language. The specific language or languages offered will be decided by individual schools.

By developing their oracy, reading and writing skills, children will also develop intercultural understanding and a sense of living in the world, and will learn to appreciate different cultures and communities and compare them with their own. They will explore the similarities and differences between other languages and English and Welsh.

Children will be encouraged to appreciate that the ability to understand and communicate in another language is a lifelong skill for learning, leisure and employment in this country and throughout the world.

Design and technology

While taking account of sustainability and environmental issues in the twenty-first century, schools will teach children to design and make products by combining their skills with knowledge and understanding. They will be encouraged to make decisions based on the values that are the basis of society, helping them become active and informed citizens. They will be made aware of human achievement and big ideas that have shaped the world.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

Children will build on their skills, knowledge and understanding by developing a growing awareness of how relevant and believable information is and begin to identify and question bias in sources.

They will be taught to become increasingly independent in how they use safe and suitable information sources, both ICT and non-ICT, and how to use a range of ICT skills and resources to find, analyse, communicate, present and share information. They will become increasingly aware of the social, ethical, moral and economic effects of ICT in wider society.

History

Children will learn by questioning, and focusing on the main political, economic, social and cultural features of selected periods from the histories of Wales and Britain during the last millennium. They will learn about the different experiences people have had in each period, and develop their understanding of the causes of events and how things change over time.

Music

Children will get involved with and enjoy making music by performing, composing and appraising. They will develop musical skills including singing and playing instruments, and practising, improvising, composing and arranging music. They will also learn to listen to and appraise music.

Geography

Children will expand on their knowledge and understanding of how processes shape both natural and human landscapes. They will carry out investigations, use maps, gather data, and analyse and synthesise information.

They will be encouraged to make informed judgements about everyday issues, develop an reflect on their own views and opinions and develop a sense of responsibility for the environment and their role in the world.

Art and design

Children develop an increased ability to make a connection between how they create their own work and the work of other artists, craftworkers and designers. They will become increasingly independent in their choice of materials and processes, and from past experiences they will gain confidence in using visual, tactile and sensory language.

Physical education (PE)

As children's confidence grows, their ability to take part in activities that become technically more demanding will also increase. They will learn the benefits of working with others to strengthen a team or partnership in order to beat others. They will also learn to practise for events.

Schools will encourage children to understand that being involved in an activity will benefit their health and fitness and take greater responsibility for their own well-being.

What else will my child learn?

Alongside the national curriculum subjects all children will follow a programme of religious education (RE), personal and social education (PSE) and sex education.

essentially, it is the responsibility of schools to plan and deliver a broad, balanced programme of RE, PSE and sex education designed to meet the specific needs of learners.

Literacy and numeracy

A new National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) is being introduced on a statutory basis from September 2013 to support children aged 5 to 14 to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

All children will be supported to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. These skills are not just about learning English, Welsh and mathematics, they are about being able to use skills in different situations and across a wide range of activities.

Literacy describes a set of skills, including speaking, listening, reading and writing, which allow us to make sense of the world around us.

Numeracy is based on mathematical basics. Numeracy describes the set of skills needed to tackle real-world problems in a number of situations by using numerical reasoning in order to plan how to solve the problem, and then carrying out the mathematical procedures to find the solution.

The Literacy and Numeracy Framework identifies annual literacy and numeracy expectations and will help children develop literacy and numeracy skills through all subjects in the national curriculum and by using a wide range of activities.

What are reading and numeracy tests?

National Tests

The best way to ensure that learners make good progress is to make sure that they never fall behind. This can only be achieved by regular monitoring and assessment of a learner's performance and that is why, from May 2013, all learners in Wales in year two through to year nine will sit tests in reading and numeracy.

The tests will last for about an hour and they are constructed in such a way that some learners will be able to sit them in "chunks".

This is especially important for younger learners and learners with additional learning needs. Depending on the requirements of individual learners, they can be delivered on a year group, class or small group basis.

Reading Tests

The reading tests will span two year groups (Yr 2 – Yr 3, Yr 4 – Yr 5, Yr 6 – Yr7 and Yr 8 – Yr 9). New tests will be developed for 2014 so no learner will sit the same test twice.

The tests will consist of a number of passages followed by short, closed response and multiple choice type questions. However, there will also be optional test materials made available to schools which they can use to further investigate learners' strengths and weaknesses.

Numeracy Tests

The numeracy test is split into two sections. One section assesses knowledge of numerical procedures such as addition, division and multiplication whilst the other, the reasoning test, assesses learners' ability to apply this knowledge to everyday problems.

In 2013 the numeracy test will assess procedural knowledge only. This will give teachers time to adjust their approach to the teaching of numeracy and will ensure that learners are familiar with the kind of tasks with which they will be presented when they come to sit the reasoning test for the first time in May 2014.

How can I support my child's learning?

Parental involvement is vitally important in helping children to learn. You can help your child's learning by getting actively involved, not just at home but as part of your everyday lives together. Take an interest and talk about what topics they are following at school and try to make sure they have a quiet place to study and do homework.

Ideas for learning together at home

- Encouraging your child to read, even for just 10 minutes a day, can make a real difference. Reading material can vary, encourage your child to read not just books and magazines but also websites, apps, games and so on.
- Keeping up-to-date with the news will help children develop their awareness of the local, national and world community. Try to encourage them to read the newspaper or web-based news once or twice a week.

- When going through household bills, discuss with them what the bill shows and the various options on how to pay. This is a valuable life skill.
- Involve children in planning trips, holidays or events and even in household tasks and DIY.
- Try and relate some of the family weekend activities to what they are currently being taught at school. It will help make learning more fun.
- Remember, activities that involve using the internet, games and sports all offer valuable and fun opportunities to apply skills and knowledge.
- Encourage your child to do their best with their homework and complete it on time.

School attendance

Of course, the best way to support your child's learning is to make sure that they don't miss lessons. So, give your child the best possible start in life by making sure they attend school at all times.

Do children with special educational needs follow the national curriculum?

Most children, including those with additional learning needs, will be able to follow the national curriculum. However, at times, a headteacher may decide that all or part of the national curriculum should not apply, temporarily, to a child with special educational needs. In very exceptional cases for some children, such as those with Statements of Special Educational Needs issued by the local authority, it may be decided that the national curriculum should not apply on a permanent basis. This is known as 'disapplication'.

You can also find out more about what is provided for children with additional learning needs at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Can I withdraw my child from the national curriculum?

There is no parental right to withdraw children from national curriculum subjects, or from the arrangements to assess children's progress in these subjects. However, you do have the right to withdraw your child from religious education and any sex education which may be provided.

How is my child assessed?

Each national curriculum subject has its own set of challenging targets which cover a series of steps, or levels, on a common national scale. Within each subject, your child's progress is assessed against national standards based on eight levels and Exceptional Performance (EP). This helps teachers to plan lessons according to age and ability, and helps to assess children's progress.

Teachers assess children's work from day to day, in all subjects and activities. In particular, they will assess progress in the core subjects of English, Welsh (either as a first or second language), mathematics and science.

The teacher will decide which level on the national curriculum scale best reflects your child's progress in each of the core subjects. This assessment draws on all aspects of your child's work in school and in their homework.

How will I know how my child is getting on?

You will receive a written report about your child's progress at least once a year. You will also have the opportunity to meet with your child's teacher.

Information from the national curriculum assessment will form part of the yearly report. The yearly report will also include feedback from your child's teacher about strengths and areas for improvement, attendance and achievements. The report will form the basis for a discussion about your child's learning needs and next steps.

At the end of Key Stage 3 your child's report will include a national curriculum level for each subject. This will give you a 'snapshot' view of your child's progress and level of achievement against national curriculum standards.

The report will also include some information about how the results for the whole school compare with local and national standards.

For further information about school reports see www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

The national curriculum levels

National Curriculum Outcomes 1, 2 and 3

Teachers may report on progress for children who are progressing towards the first step on the national curriculum using the three 'outcome' steps that come before achievement at Level 1.

National Curriculum Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4

For some children, performance below the expected level may be a huge achievement.

National Curriculum Level 5

This is the expected level for children at the end of Key Stage 3 – most but not all children will achieve this level.

National Curriculum Levels 6, 7 and 8

Achievement at level 6 or beyond shows they are achieving above average.

Exceptional Performance (EP)

Some children might be expected to achieve significantly above the expected level.

N – Not awarded a level

Very rarely there are circumstances that prevent a school from having enough knowledge and evidence on which to base a teacher assessment.

D – Disapplied

In some circumstances the headteacher may decide that all or part of the national curriculum does not apply to an individual, for example because of a child's special educational needs.

It is important to remember that different children will achieve at different rates, but at the end of Key Stage 3 most children are expected to achieve Level 5 on the national curriculum scale in each core subject.

For information about the national curriculum descriptors visit

www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Reading and numeracy test scoring and reporting

The tests will be marked in schools and learner raw scores will be converted to standardised scores and age-equivalent scores. The standardised score will show how your child's performance in the test compares to other children of the same age who have sat the test in Wales. The age-equivalent score will tell you whether your child's reading age (or equivalent for numeracy) is equivalent to, above or below their actual age, based on how he or she performed in the test. You will receive these scores in a report from your child's school.

The scores act as a guide to how your child is performing in reading and numeracy. Your child's teacher will give a fuller picture of his or her performance in these areas in the end of term report.

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School reports

Who is entitled to receive reports and other information from the school?

You are entitled to receive a copy of your child's report from the school. You are also entitled to receive a copy of the governors' annual report.

Divorced or separated parents and others who may have parental responsibility for a child are equally entitled to this information unless there is a court order which would prevent this.

For more information about parents/carers and parental responsibility visit www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Need more information?

You can get more information from the following sources.

- Your school – speak to your child's teacher, the headteacher or a member of the governing body.
- Your local authority.
- By visiting the our website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills
www.wales.gov.uk/schoolsinfo4parents
- By visiting the Careers Wales website at www.careerswales.com

Who can I talk to if I have concerns?

If you have concerns you should talk to your child's teacher first. If your child's school has a person chosen to be the first point of contact for concerns or complaints you could also speak to this person.

If you are still concerned, you can raise your concern as a complaint. The school's policy on handling complaints will tell you how to do this.

School Banding

Banding is not about labelling naming or shaming schools, or creating a league table. It is about putting schools into groups to identify which need support and which we can learn from. Banding will help make effective improvements to schools across Wales. www.wales.gov.uk/schoolsinfo4parents

A smooth move into Key Stage 4

Children in the final two years of compulsory education will follow a curriculum including English, Welsh, mathematics and science. They will also have to continue to study physical education, religious education, personal and social education, sex education and to learn about careers and the world of work.

Most will also follow a choice of courses that lead to qualifications such as General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) or vocational qualifications relevant to particular sectors.

The Welsh Government recently reviewed qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales and will be making some changes to qualifications for courses starting in September 2015.

The school will offer lots of information and support to young people and their parents/carers to help them make good decisions about their education.

Options at Key Stage 4

In the last year of Key Stage 3 (Year 9), young people in secondary schools maintained by local authorities will be offered at least 30 choices of courses to study. At least five of these will be vocational or more career- or practical-based courses.

This allows them to follow a broad and balanced curriculum and to choose courses that both interest and motivate them. This should help them to achieve good outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4.

Young people in Key Stage 4 will also have access to learner support services, including learning coaching, to help them overcome any barriers to their learning.

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Welsh Baccalaureate

Most schools in Wales also now offer the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. It has two parts – the core and options. The core is compulsory and is made up of five parts;

- Essential Skills Wales and Key Skills
- Work-related education
- Wales, Europe and the world
- Personal and social education

Individual investigation.

Students choose options for qualification from the choices on offer at the school at the appropriate levels. These might be GCSEs or vocational qualifications as appropriate to the individual learner.

Following the Review of Qualifications for 14-19 year olds the Welsh Government will be making some changes to the Welsh Baccalaureate for courses starting in September 2015.

For more information about the Welsh Baccalaureate visit: www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/qualificationsinwales/qualificationtypesinwales/welshbac

and for information about the Review of Qualifications visit: www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/qualificationsinwales

Considering careers and the world of work in Key Stage 4

What can my child expect?

- Careers and the world of work is an important part of the school curriculum and in preparing children for their future move into employment. Schools should make sure that children have opportunities to learn about the world of work, the skills, knowledge and qualifications employers need, and the range of careers choices available.
- Work experience is an important part of learning for children aged 14 to 19. It gives them opportunities to improve their knowledge and understanding of, and the skills that they will need for, the world of work, as well as of enterprise and entrepreneurship.

This could include children carrying out placements with an employer. Although there is no requirement on the schools to provide work experience, many do.

Useful contacts for parents of 11-14 year olds

This list of useful contacts will help you as a parent to gain more information to help you support the children in your lives.

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***Bitesize** is the BBC's free online resource to help children in the UK with their school work.
www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize

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***Childline** is a 24 hour confidential service for children and young people in the UK dealing with any concerns from child abuse to drugs.
www.childline.org.uk

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***LoveReading4kids** will help you to explore books that will excite them and help them to fall in love with reading.
www.lovereadings4kids.co.uk

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***Sumdog** is a site that offers games to make mathematics fun. They are all free to play with the option to subscribe for extra features.
www.sumdog.com

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Apprenticeships are vocational qualifications find out about Apprenticeships in Wales, and why these programmes could be right for your child. Go to www.wales.gov.uk

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Change4life gives you ideas and recipes to help you and your family be healthier and happier.
www.change4lifewales.org.uk

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How is your child's school doing?

A website that provides information on schools' performance across Wales.
www.mylowalschool.wales.gov.uk

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***BBC Advice for parents**

From homework help to Special Educational Needs, find out how to help your child at school.
www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents

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MEIC

Is the confidential helpline service for children and young people in Wales. From finding out what's going on in your local area to helping deal with bullying.

www.meiccymru.org

Careers Wales

For information and advice about helping your child to make choices for their future career.

www.careerswales.com

Estyn

Find out more about how your child's school is performing.

www.estyn.gov.uk

** Please note this website is only available in English.*

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