



Guidance

Curriculum & Standards

Helping children achieve throughout Year 6 – English and mathematics

Year 6 Teachers

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High expectations

Many schools have asked for advice on how best to balance priorities in Year 6. This leaflet suggests the priorities for teaching English and mathematics in Year 6, including ways to prepare children for the tests. By the end of Year 6 the vast majority of children should achieve standards in reading, writing and mathematics that enable them to take full advantage of all that the secondary curriculum has to offer. The Key Stage 2 national tests help to measure this.

Children's performance during Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics has improved significantly over the last few years. Children's work is now of a higher standard and teachers are raising their expectations of what children can do. The majority of schools use the optional tests in Years 3, 4 and 5 to help track progress and to make a focused assessment of children's strengths and weaknesses to inform teaching in the following year.

Both the optional and statutory tests focus on central aspects of the curriculum and on children's skills in independently applying what they know to the questions. In English, they are expected to respond to texts and prompts that they haven't seen before; in mathematics they are required to use their knowledge to answer familiar and unfamiliar questions. This means that teachers expect children to 'think on their feet' and to work things out there and then. This is, of course, what being literate and numerate really means.

The priority is teaching

The most important aspect of work in Year 6 needs to be teaching and learning.

In English children need to read exciting and challenging texts and to engage with meaning and effects. They need to explore how language is used and how different texts work.

Writing in a wide range of forms for different purposes is essential. Teachers can help children to write independently by:

- focusing on the decisions they need to make when undertaking a piece of writing;
- teaching them how to plan quickly for content;
- showing them how to choose the best form for what they want to say;
- giving them routines for checking their work for accuracy.

In mathematics children need to:

- rehearse and refine their oral and mental knowledge, skills and strategies;
- remember to ask themselves 'Can I do this in my head?';
- be explicit about their written method of calculation;
- tackle problems set in different contexts, which require formal and written procedures, and the use of a calculator;
- build up their speed and accuracy in mental arithmetic, by answering some 5-, 10- and 15-second questions in the mental starters of lessons.

This means teaching the Literacy Hour and daily mathematics lesson all the way through the year, using the objectives in the Frameworks. This is much the best way to help children make maximum progress during the year right up to the end of the summer and to make good choices independently when it comes to the tests.

Teachers' knowledge of the types of questions in the tests can be used as part of teaching, questioning and discussing in English and mathematics. For example:

- when talking about texts in the Literacy Hour and beyond, use precise questions to focus on how language is used, not just accepting a general impression, and insist on evidence from the text to support ideas;
- when planning for mathematics, build in examples based on test questions. Slight alterations to past questions (for example, changing the numbers involved) can quickly provide a range of questions to use in lessons. It helps to increase children's confidence to tell them that 'these are like the questions in the test'.

Sensible preparation for the tests

Children need to be prepared to work under time constraints and to understand what they will be asked to do in the tests. They also need to develop confidence in their own knowledge and skills to enable them to do themselves justice.

Introducing the test

To help children have realistic ideas about the tests, remind them of the types of texts, questions, problems or prompts they can expect. Take one or two sessions to introduce children to such features as:

- the types, formats and layout of questions;
- what the instructions mean;
- the significance of different numbers of marks;
- how much writing or working out is expected;
- which questions in mathematics are best answered mentally or require formal recording, and when and how to use a calculator efficiently, so that children check if they can use 'mental' methods first.

Practice tests

Many children are familiar with the test format from taking tests earlier in the key stage. Give children one or two practice tests under timed conditions. This is best done in the lead up to the tests so that maximum time is given to teaching during the year.

When children have undertaken a practice test, go through the paper with them and discuss their answers, in the light of the mark scheme. The QCA Standards Reports contain information about how children answer the questions, so use them when debriefing the class. Make explicit how children should tackle the questions so that they show what they really can do.

Tests week

The test papers allow children to obtain marks in all parts of the paper. Remind children to persevere to the end, even if some questions are difficult, since they may well be able to answer later questions. In Reading it is not helpful for children to go through selecting particular questions to answer, since the paper takes them through each text in turn and reading is interrupted if questions are chosen because they look easy!

Teachers need to make themselves familiar with the arrangements for tests, including what support is available. For example, the Writing prompts are to be read to the children at the start of the test, but children should make their own choice of prompt. Encourage children to remember the strategies they have been taught when tackling questions, and not to rely on memorising content. The special arrangements should be used appropriately to support particular children, for example, in deciding whether some children may need the questions in the mathematics test to be read to them.

Teacher assessment

Teacher assessment is based on assessment of a much wider range of evidence than the tests can cover. During the year, Year 6 teachers gather a detailed picture of children's achievements, building on evidence from previous years. This knowledge helps inform decisions about planning and teaching. It forms the basis of teacher assessment, which is a judgement independent of the tests. It covers some areas which are not tested, such as Speaking and Listening, and other areas where the tests can only offer limited evidence, such as the range of reading and writing and the application of mathematical knowledge in a variety of contexts.

Useful references

Teachers may also find it useful to refer to QCA's series of leaflets *Implications for Teaching & Learning* that were sent to all schools in November 2001.

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Tel: 0845 60 222 60
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Textphone: 0845 60 555 60
Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com
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