

- ✓ Understanding Key Stages 3 and 4
- ✓ Information on National Curriculum tests
- ✓ Helping your child

**PARENT  
KNOW  
HOW**

What your child is  
**learning**  
at school

**11-16**

department for  
**education and skills**

# AT A GLANCE

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## Understanding Key Stages 3 and 4 (ages 11–16)

- All children in state schools follow the National Curriculum, which sets out the subjects and skills they have the right to learn. There are four key stages, and children aged between 11 and 16 pass through Key Stages 3 and 4.
- In Key Stage 3 (between the ages of 11 and 14), your child will study 14 subjects. They will be continually assessed in all subjects, but will take National Curriculum tests in three of them: English, maths and science.
- At the end of key stage 3, your child will need to choose the subjects that they will study at Key Stage 4. It's an important decision that will affect the opportunities that are open to them when they leave school.
- Your support at this time is important. You can make sure your child makes the most of their time at school and help them choose the right subjects for their future.
- As well as the subjects your child chooses to study in Key Stage 4, there are nine compulsory subjects and your child can gain qualifications in some or all of them.
- As well as continuing to take an active interest in your child's education, try to encourage them to think very carefully about what they want to do after they finish school at the age of 16. Do they want to carry on studying, try to find paid work or do both at the same time?

### Did you know?

The National Curriculum tests that your child will take at the age of 14 are called 'key stage tests' and are commonly known as 'SATs'.

# The National Curriculum for secondary school

The move to secondary education can be a demanding time for children. Once again they are the youngest in the school, and they have a whole new way of learning to get used to. On a personal level, they are facing all the challenges of becoming a teenager.

In secondary school, the National Curriculum sets out what your child must learn, and plays an important part in preparing them for the adult world. When your child engages with it, they are gaining skills and knowledge for lifelong learning. They are also learning to think independently.

Between the ages of 11 and 16, your child will pass through Key Stages 3 and 4 of the National Curriculum. At the end of Key Stage 3 (around the age of 14), they will choose what subjects to study in the last two years of school. It's an important decision that will affect the opportunities they have later in life.

This booklet gives you information to help your child make the most of their education at secondary school. It tells you:

- the subjects your child will study
- how they will be assessed
- practical tips for supporting your child with their schoolwork.

## The National Curriculum

The National Curriculum allows all children to be educated in a way that is balanced and challenging. It lists the subjects and skills that every child has a right to learn and enables teachers to measure how well children are doing, so that they can help them do better.

## Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14)

### What subjects will your child study?

In England, in the early years of secondary school, your child will study:

- English
- Maths
- Science
- Design and technology (DT)
- History
- Religious education (RE)
- Citizenship
- Geography
- Art and design
- Music
- Information and communication technology (ICT)
- Modern foreign languages
- Physical education (PE)
- Sex education

Some schools will teach other subjects, such as personal, social and health education. These are optional, but very valuable subjects to study.

### Measuring your child's progress

You might have heard teachers talk about learning 'levels', which measure how far your child is progressing in certain subjects. There are eight levels in the National Curriculum – Level 1 is the lowest and Level 8 the highest. By the end of Key Stage 3, most children are between Levels 5 and 6.

- Your child's teachers will continually assess what level they are at in each subject.
- At the end of Key Stage 3 – around the age of 14 – your child will also take National Curriculum tests in English, maths and science.
- Your school will give you the test results for English, maths and science and the teacher assessment levels for English, maths, science, DT, history, geography, art and design, music, ICT, modern foreign languages and PE.
- National Curriculum tests are compulsory for all state school pupils, but there is no pass or fail. Teachers will use the test results to help plan your child's future learning.
- Tests normally take place over four days at the beginning of May. Each test lasts no longer than one hour and fifteen minutes, and your child won't be tested on anything that isn't in the National Curriculum.

### Remember...

**...not all children develop at the same rate or have the same talents. If your child is at a lower level than other children, it doesn't mean they have failed.**

## Helping your child through Key Stage 3

Showing a continued interest in your child's education will encourage them to do well, no matter how old they are. But there are many other ways you can help.

- Make sure your child has a quiet place to do their homework, so that they can focus on the task they've been set.
- Don't forget to praise them regularly – even for the smallest achievements.
- Bear in mind that as your child becomes a teenager, they might become more distant. But they'll still need your attention and support – on a personal and educational level.
- When tests come round, make sure they get a good night's sleep. Give them a good, healthy breakfast before they leave for school. And make sure they arrive on time.

**When your child has to choose subjects for Key Stage 4, take an active interest so that you can help them make good choices.**

## Help with National Curriculum tests?

Tests are in English, maths and science, and cover what your child has learned in previous years. You can speak to your child's school if you want to know more information about the tests. Or you can visit [www.qca.org.uk/testguide/](http://www.qca.org.uk/testguide/) where you will find a guide to how your child will be assessed.

- The booklet *Making subject choices at 14* gives more information about choosing subjects. As a general guide, ask if your child knows what they want to do when they leave school. If they don't, it's a good idea to study a wide range of subjects and keep their options open.

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## Key Stage 4 (ages 14–16)

### What subjects will your child study?

Even though your child will choose some of the subjects they will take in Key Stage 4, there are still some subjects that everybody has to study. Some of them can lead to a qualification, but others do not:

- English
- Maths
- Science
- Information and communication technology (ICT)

- Religious education (RE)
- Physical education (PE)
- Work-related learning
- Sex and relationships
- Citizenship

### Measuring your child's progress

One of the great things about Key Stage 4 is that it allows your child to follow a course of education that is suited to their interests and skills. And in the same way that there are lots of subjects to choose from, there is also a range of qualifications children can study for.

<b>GCSEs (General Certificates of Secondary Education)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taken by most children in most subjects.</li><li>• Grades range from A* to G.</li><li>• Since 2002, GCSEs in vocational subjects have been available that develop knowledge and understanding of a particular vocational area by investigating the world of work. These are double awards and are graded A*A* to GG.</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• GCSE short courses are also available. They are equivalent to half a GCSE and can be completed in a year.</li></ul>
<b>Vocational Qualifications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work-based courses that aren't for a particular job.</li><li>• For subjects like leisure and tourism or health and social care.</li></ul>
<b>NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Usually for adults doing particular jobs in specific areas such as preparing food.</li><li>• Your child might get an NVQ or work towards one during a work placement.</li></ul>
<b>Entry level certificates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Designed for learners not ready for GCSEs, Vocational Qualifications or NVQs.</li></ul>

## Helping your child through Key Stage 4

They might not show it very often, but even teenagers coming to the end of their time at school value their parents' support. Don't let their growing independence fool you. Showing an interest in how well they are doing in the classroom can make a real difference to the qualifications they get.

- **Help your child organise and prioritise their work.** Homework and revision can be overwhelming if children don't break them down into smaller tasks. Encourage them to have a written plan or timetable.
- **Remember that it's not all about exams.** Your child will also have important coursework during the school year. Grades for coursework go towards your child's qualification – encourage your child to hand it in on time.
- **Make revision more interesting for them.** Does your child feel isolated revising for exams? Encourage them to teach you about what they've been studying so that they have contact while they revise.
- **Keep an eye open for problems** that could interfere with your child's education. Bullying, truancy and even relationships can all affect a person's motivation to work.
- **Give them space** – not just space to do homework and revise, but emotional space too. All teenagers want time to themselves as they become more independent.

### Thinking ahead

At some point during Key Stage 4, your child will need to make a decision about what they want to do at the end of Year 11. Will they study A levels in sixth form or go to college? Will they do an apprenticeship or go straight into a full-time, paid job? It's a good idea to encourage them to start thinking as early as possible and to get advice from a teacher or a Connexions Personal Adviser. The Connexions Direct website ([www.connexions-direct.com](http://www.connexions-direct.com)) will help your child consider their options.

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## Want to find out more?

### Information for parents

**[www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)**

**Information for students and parents on 14–19 education.** A factual guide to all the compulsory tests that your child will complete between the ages of 7 and 14 is available at **[www.qca.org.uk/testguide](http://www.qca.org.uk/testguide)**

**[www.vocationallearning.org.uk](http://www.vocationallearning.org.uk)**

Provides information on the GCSEs in vocational subjects for pupils and parents.

**[www.nc.uk.net](http://www.nc.uk.net)**

Outlines the National Curriculum.

**[www.parentscentre.gov.uk/guidetocurriculum11to14](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/guidetocurriculum11to14)**

(For 11 to 14-year-olds)

**[www.parentscentre.gov.uk/guidetocurriculum14to16](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/guidetocurriculum14to16)**

(For 14 to 16-year-olds)

Information on how to help your child learn, the key stages and different types of assessment.

### Information for young people

**[www.qca.org.uk/gcse](http://www.qca.org.uk/gcse)**

A student guide to GCSEs.

**[www.qca.org.uk/alevel](http://www.qca.org.uk/alevel)**

A student guide to AS and A levels.

**[www.qca.org.uk/examsdoctor](http://www.qca.org.uk/examsdoctor)**

Hints and tips from the exams doctor on revision, studying and what to do when you get your results.

### Can't get onto the internet at home?

Visit your local library which will have computers and internet access.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from: DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.  
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