

The New National Curriculum (NC)

Explanatory Notes for Parents 2015

The National Curriculum gives a framework to schools for what should be taught in key stages one and two, for the 'core' and 'foundation' subjects. These are set out below:

Core subjects

English (including reading and writing), Mathematics and Science

Foundation subjects

Art & Design, Computing, Design and Technology, Languages (KS2), Geography, History, Music and PE.

Schools are also required to teach RE.

The new national curriculum was introduced in schools in September 2014. Although many things within the curriculum have stayed the same, or very similar to, the previous national curriculum, the new framework is more challenging in some aspects; for example there is a stronger focus on grammar, spelling and arithmetic.

The framework doesn't tell teachers how to teach, but it does include the essential knowledge and skills every child should have. Schools and teachers can then plan teaching and learning opportunities to match children's needs and interests.

What is changing in assessment?

Previously, a child's attainment in the national curriculum was assessed against "levels", with information about levels being reported to parents at the end of the key stages. This information was based on test results and teacher assessment in reading and mathematics, and teacher assessment in writing and science. Many parents will have heard of pupils being assessed, at the end of the year or key stage, with teachers using phrases such as "working at a level 2", or "achieving a level 4".

An average child was expected to achieve at least a level 2 by the end of Year 2 (aged 7), and at least a level 4 by the end of Y6 (aged 11). This is still the case for children in these two year groups (Y2 and Y6) in summer 2015. This is the last time "levels" will be used for formal assessments. Other children in school are already being taught using the new national curriculum framework; this was introduced in September 2014.

This new curriculum is organised largely in **year group expectations**, with the phrase "level" not being used to assess children's attainment. Instead, teachers will be assessing whether a child achieves the **standard expected for their year group**. Teachers already assess children throughout the year to help them in their planning for teaching activities and identify the "next steps" in learning.

Assessment is often informal and may involve the teacher or perhaps a support assistant observing the child in a variety of situations, talking to them and questioning them to check out their understanding, and of course marking their work. This is sometimes called "assessment for learning" because it helps children to learn well. These assessment methods will continue - but teachers will be thinking about the new national curriculum framework in their planning, teaching and assessments from now on.

When you get your child's report, or talk to your child's teacher perhaps at a parents meeting, the teacher may start to use phrases such as "**working in line with the year group expectations**", or "**working at about typical development for their age**". Or they may tell you that your child is **working below the typical expectation for their age**; in this case they will probably give you some information about how they are helping your child catch up, or "close the gap" with other children of their age, and what you can do at home to help.

Teachers are encouraged to stretch higher ability children within the year group expectations by, for example, applying skills in investigative work rather than necessarily moving on to the next year group expectations. Teachers can, however, move a child on to the next year group expectations in the curriculum, if they feel this is appropriate. This probably will be unusual, especially as the new curriculum has built in a higher level of challenge than the previous curriculum.

Children with special educational needs who are working below the expectations for Year 1 of the new National Curriculum will be assessed using the "P Scales" which break down learning into small steps. These have not changed. Your child's teacher will be able to give you a fuller explanation of the P scales if these are being used for your child.

What about statutory assessments at the end of key stages 1 and 2 from next year?

Summer 2015 is the last time that "levels" will be used for reporting results for children at the end of the key stage. From summer 2016, formal test and teacher assessment results will be reported using descriptions which compare children's attainment to the "expected" attainment for the age of the child. More information about this is likely to be published by the government later this year.

What about children in the nursery and reception classes? What about High School?

Teachers of children in the nursery or reception class are part of the Early Years Foundation Stage and are still using the Early Years Foundation Stage framework to help them organise their learning and assessment opportunities. This has not changed.

The curriculum *has* changed however at KS3 and 4, for children at high school, in a similar way to the changes at KS1 and KS2.

At both points in a child's school life - when moving from reception to Year 1, or from Year 6 to Year 7 at high school - teachers will pass on the relevant assessment information, so that the child can settle in quickly and make progress in the next stage of their school life.

Where can I find out more?

Further information about the new national curriculum, the assessment arrangements for the EYFS, KS1 and KS2, and the P scales, can be found at:

www.gov.uk website, then put 'national curriculum' in search bar
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/standards-and-testing-agency
www.gov.uk/teacher-assessment-using-p-scales